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FEBRUARY—309

MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

FEB., 1976
VOL. 38, NO. 2

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

THE BLEEDING SHADOWS

by BRETT HALLIDAY

When the redhead finds Tex Long's body, he set off a bizarre, ever more sinister chain reaction that opens with the enigma of why a posh mortician should inter a mere newsstand operator—and ultimately draws in the Syndicate, the F.B.I. and a lethal army of underground guerillas out to hold Miami Beach for ransom. Where is Shayne in all this? You guessed it—right in the middle.

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THE \$3,000,000 COP

JERRY JACOBSON

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The Bleeding Shadows

Tex's murder looked simple at first, but solving it embroiled Shayne with the FBI, the police and a murderous secret army.

by BRETT HALLIDAY



THE NEWSSTAND was a corner hole-in-the-wall on one of Miami's original intersections. It was squeezed from the right by a second-hand store and from behind by a pawn shop.

Mike Shayne piloted the powerful Buick across the intersection and braked in front of the newsstand, cut the motor and doused the headlights. Then he sat for a few seconds, nursing a split knuckle as he surveyed the immediate vicinity.

In this area of the city it paid to be wary.

The streets and sidewalks seemed quiet. It was 9:30 on a soggy Friday evening, and the newsstand was the only place of business still open. All other places had been buttoned up for the night. Shadows of the dimly-lighted storefronts dominated. No one could know what might be lurking in any of the shadows, and so only the autochthons were still cruising

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NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL



the streets and sidewalks. Strangers were instinctively leery of the shadows.

The hulking private detective left the Buick. Fog had umbrel-laed the city, but it remained high. It would settle like a shroud later. Shayne went around the front of the car and up on the sidewalk, his size and sure steps an instant warning to any would-be ripoff artist who might be sniffing hungrily in one of the darker depths. He had the sensation that eyes were assaying him, but he looked neither right nor left as he marched to the recessed doorway of the newsstand.

Texford Long was his target. Long had provided the choice alley tidbit that had allowed the redhead to salt down Big Ben Caster. Caster was in the slammer now, pinned for heisting \$30,000 from the dowager Ann Wright.

Shayne had retrieved most of the 30 G's, had hauled a bruised and battered Caster to Will Gentry, chief of Miami Police, returned to the dowager to collect the remainder of his fee over a cup of tea—and now he was going to drop a bill on Long for the tip.

Long was an informer who had been sliding in and out of Miami's darker side doors for years. He was not the most law-abiding citizen to waltz

down Dixie Highway. It was his habit to grab money from any source, and for any piece of information. This habit made him a borderline blackmailer. But that aside, Tex Long didn't send an informee chasing wispy rumors either. He peddled straight stuff and Shayne occasionally turned to him.

The newsstand was Long's domain. He had owned and operated it for as long as anybody in the neighborhood could remember. Long was a loner, had never been known to have a woman or family. It was as if—already aged and seasoned—he might have been put on earth by some kind of electronic monster. Long simply had always been around, a six-foot-eight string of narrow bone and weathered flesh with eyes and ears that were better than radar at picking up tips.

Shayne entered the newsstand and stopped dead. He was instantly alert. His gray eyes searched hard as he took in the seemingly empty interior with its narrow aisles leading back through the kaleidoscope of newspapers, magazines and paperback books.

The hackles on the back of his neck stirred, and the .45 snug in its shoulder rig under his coat was suddenly a comforting weight. He had a familiar gut-feeling. Something was

not right inside the newsstand.

Immediately to his right stood the stubby checkout counter with the ancient cash register taking up half the counter space. Behind the counter was the ever-present radio and the old-fashioned wood stool from which Tex Long normally ruled.

The radio, to Long, was like a third hand. Rock music came from it now, but periodically there were short newscasts—and these were Long's bread and butter. He lived for the next act of crime in the city. Perhaps he could sniff out a piece of information from some unknown source relating to that crime, and perhaps that piece of info eventually would turn a buck for him.

"Tex!"

Shayne's gruff call produced only an echo. He scowled, planted both fists on the stubby counter and took a quick look behind it. His scowl deepened when he saw the open drawer of the cash register. There was a single dime inside the drawer.

He turned from the counter, his grey eyes taking in everything in detail. To his left, there was only the recessed front door. No windows. Any transaction at the counter—a ripoff—could have taken place without being detected by curi-

ous street eyes. To his right were the three narrow aisles. The middle aisle led to an open door in the back wall. A dim light was glowing beyond it.

Shayne moved down the middle aisle slowly, all of his senses taut. He was about halfway to the open door when he heard a scraping sound to his left, He froze.

The sound was not repeated.

Slowly he lifted his right leg and planted the toe of his shoe on one of the shelves. He reached out and grabbed the top shelf with both hands, paused, then heaved himself up and peered over the top into the next aisle. A young fat boy was crawling on hands and knees toward the front of the store.

Shayne yelled as the entire row of shelves began to tip under his weight. Magazines and books spilled around him, and he heard a yelp from the boy. He shoved clear of the shelving and dashed toward the front of the store. The shelving rocked precariously before settling. He caught the boy coming out of the next aisle, on his feet and running low, his round face a mask of terror.

Shayne slammed both hands on the boy's shoulders and yanked. This brought another yelp from the boy. He struggled violently, his head down, his arms flailing, his feet kicking.

Shayne could have brought a knee up into the boy's middle and silenced him, but he did not want to injure the kid. So he slid in behind him and fastened a muscular forearm under the boy's chin and yanked.

The move brought the boy up straight against the detective's front, where he continued to struggle wildly for a few seconds. Shayne applied pressure slowly until the struggling ceased. The boy's fat fingers found his coat sleeve and dug in, attempting to pull the clamp from his throat. Shayne held him until even his fingers stopped digging. Then he released the youth and quickly slid around to block flight to the front door.

The kid looked terrified. He stood on widespread feet, hunching into himself. He was quivering. His mouth worked, but no sounds came from it. His eyes were round dark globes. He was a stubby lad with a long wild thatch of sand-blond hair and a large purplish splotch along his right jawline. He looked about eighteen to twenty in a purple tank shirt with a reproduction of a motorcycle rider on the front, scruffy bluejeans and frayed tennies. There was an odor about him.

Shayne's nose twitched against the marijuana smell as he growled, "Okay, kid, how

come you're on the panic button? Where's Tex?"

The boy cowered. "I—I didn't do it," he stammered. His voice broke, became a squeak.

"Do what?" snapped Shayne.

The boy used a thumb in a stabbing motion over a fat shoulder without taking his frightened eyes from the redhead. "B-Back there. I didn't do it."

Shayne stepped back, snapped the front door lock, then caught the boy's arm, turned him down the aisle. The boy balked. Shayne waltzed him to the open door in the back wall. He had a hunch about what he was going to find there before he was in position to see inside. And it was there.

He exhaled sharply as he took in the scene. The room was small, lighted only by a low-wattage ceiling bulb that cast a pale yellow light which failed to reach into all the corners. There were cartons of paperback books and wired bundles of magazines, no furniture. The floor was littered. In the middle of the litter lay the body of Tex Long.

II

SHAYNE MOVED the still resisting boy into the back room. He motioned him on around to the opposite side of the dead man.

The boy moved slowly. He looked like a trapped animal. It was exactly the position Shayne wanted him in. There was no way out for the boy except through the detective.

The redhead went down on one knee and studied the corpse. He grimaced. Long lay on his right side, his long body curled, his knees drawn up toward his narrow middle. His ankles had been trussed with his belt, a necktie knotted his wrists together, a large section of shirt front had been ripped free and stuffed into his mouth. There was a knife hole still leaking blood from his heart and his eyes had been dug from their sockets.

Shayne touched the body. It was soft and pliable. There was a trace of warmth. Long had not been dead more than twenty minutes. Grimly, Shayne wondered which had come first—the popping of the eyes or the hole in the heart.

The detective stood and the boy leaped back, fell across a low stack of paperback cartons. Shayne stepped over the body and grabbed the tank shirt, pulled the boy to his feet. He patted the lad down expertly, jammed fingers into the pockets of his jeans. They were empty.

The redhead frowned. The open cash register, the body, most of the evidence, pointed to



a simple street hit. Somebody enters the newsstand, finds Tex alone, yanks out a knife and cleans out the cash register, then takes Tex into the back room and kills him, the killing necessary because Tex knows his assailant. It's someone of the neighborhood. But a private eye enters, interrupts the hit, captures the murderer.

Shayne stared hard at the boy. He looked clean—no knife, no loot in his jeans. Had he been smart enough to hide the knife and money upon the detective's entry into the store? The boy had been attempting to sneak out.

Shayne faded back into the doorway, filled it. "Kid," he growled, waving an arm, "start moving it around—everything in this room. I want to see under, inside, and behind everything."

The youth looked startled, hesitated.

"Move it!" cried the redhead. "Everything!"

The search produced nothing. Shayne used the fingers and thumb of his left hand to tug at his right ear. Finally he grumbled, "That's enough. Lay it all out for me, kid. How come you're here? Who are you?"

"S-Spot," he said, standing hunched.

He was breathing hard. A sweat sheen on his fat face glistened in the pale light. But he didn't appear to be so frightened now. Only wary—and curious about the rugged-looking redhead who towered across the room from him.

He glanced at the corpse once, curled his lower lip under yellowed teeth, then looked Shayne straight in the eye. He was called Spot because of the birthmark on his face. His name was Arnie Fowler, but nobody called him Arnie, not even his old man with whom he lived in the neighborhood. Everybody called him Spot, and he and Tex had been pals for a long time, sometimes he helped Tex around the newsstand, sometimes he filled in behind the counter when Tex had business or pleasure elsewhere.

Like earlier that night—it was Tex' birthday, his 58th, and a dame Tex knew, a fry cook in a little place over on Seventh Street, was cooking

him up a special for the occasion. He, Spot, had kept the newsstand open while Tex was gone. Tex had returned around 8:30 and Spot had cut, scoped the neighborhood, but there wasn't action of any kind this Friday night, not even a hubcap raid. So he had finally wandered back to the newsstand. It was just a few minutes before 9:30 and Tex would be shutting down at ten and they'd walk together to where Tex had his room. Then, he, Spot, would go on another block to where he paddled with his old man.

Except tonight, when he had returned to the newsstand, it was empty and he had been curious about that. Normally, if Tex was called out on business, he just shut off the lights and locked up early. But tonight the lights were on and the door was open, the only trouble being that Tex wasn't anywhere in sight. So he, Spot, had been curious, had nosed around, then had found Tex dead on the floor in the back room. It had scared hell out of him and he was cutting out when the redheaded man arrived. He had attempted to sneak out but had failed to make it.

Spot repeated, "I wouldn't do nothing like this to Tex, Mister. He was my friend. Can't we go out front? I get the creepies standing here with him there

on the floor like that. T-them eyes . . ."

Shayne motioned Spot to the front of the newsstand and behind the checkout counter. He backed the boy against the wall. "Don't move a muscle," he growled.

The boy stood as if frozen as the redhead pulled a black telephone from an open shelf under the cash register. He called Police Headquarters and reported the murder. While talking, his eyes caught sight of a newspaper on the shelf. The paper had been folded to an inside story and five one-column pictures that included four men and a young girl.

Shayne put the phone back and picked up the newspaper, new lines creasing his brow. He spread it on the counter. It was a section from last Sunday's *Daily News* and the story and pictures had been displayed across the top half of the inside page.

The story was a feature about a gang of terrorists who periodically surfaced in various corners of the United States, bombed banks, utility installations, oil refineries, anything that represented big business. Deidler's Revolutionary Command hit hard and swiftly when attacking. They were deadly, had no qualms about killing innocents. It was a gang

modeled on the Tupamaro urban guerrillas of Uruguay. They took a strong anti-capitalist stance based on Marxist philosophies, but DRA soldiers were anarchists, too.

Their leader was a man named Ross Deidler, a radical who once had been a political science professor at Columbia. Most of the known gang members had been his students. Deidler had not been seen in almost two years, but the gang kept surfacing like an active volcano—quiet for weeks, then erupting without warning.

Pictured were Deidler and four known and wanted members of the DRA. The girl was living-in with one of the three bearded young men. Deidler was a clean-shaven man with a square jawline and deep-set eyes. He looked dedicated and at least ten years older than the others. Also, he wore a created beard and mustache in the reproduction. Tex Long—or someone else—had been active with a pencil.

Shayne stared hard at the pencil work. What did it mean? Had Long spotted Deidler? Was Deidler now wearing beard and mustache? Was Deidler in Miami?

He was still pondering elusive possibilities when the patrol car arrived with wailing siren and whirling red roof light.

He folded the newspaper and tossed it on the shelf, then went around to unlock the front door. The car patrolmen played God until detectives showed. One of the latter was named Henderson. He frowned when he saw Shayne. The redhead eyed him coldly, answered questions, did not offer anything.

Henderson finally took a bleating Spot off to jail as a prime suspect in the murder of Tex Long.

III

BIG BEN CASTER had taken Mike Shayne on a sixty-hour chase before the redhead finally collared him in the loft of an empty warehouse. It had been a chase that allowed little time for catnaps, and the detective made up for missed sleep that Saturday morning.

Shayne left his bed at 10:30. In the kitchen, he absently scratched the red-gold hairs of his chest as he stood for a few moments in indecision. Normally, he would scramble three to four eggs, add a couple of slices of toast and black coffee. But he had an odd feeling about this day—he sensed it was to be a rough one. His mind was filled with the memory of the dead Tex Long and a kid named Spot.

He hitched up his pajama

bottoms and fixed a coffee royale. After he looked outside and saw the drizzly weather, he added another brace to the coffee. Then he sat in his favorite chair in the front room of the apartment and picked up the telephone.

He didn't ask for Henderson, because Henderson thought all private eyes should go the way of street cars and brick pavements. Shayne reciprocated by avoiding him whenever possible. The redhead didn't mind rubbing nerve ends raw, but with Henderson it seemed a waste of time. There were other police detectives on Will Gentry's staff and most of them saw the light of cooperation.

Shayne finally got Joe Brock, a young comer in Homicide. Brock was modish, energetic, genial and had an I.Q. that made some cops wonder why he wasn't teaching at Harvard or MIT or Berkeley or some other such exotic place. Brock had caught weekend duty and been handed the Tex Long package to ponder until Henderson returned to duty on Monday.

But there didn't appear to be much to study, he told Shayne. Long's murder had all the earmarks of being a simple case of a street kid knocking off a guy who was alone in his place of business, the street kid being Arnie Fowler, who lived with

his father in a dismal three-room pad, with papa existing on welfare and wine and the boy jockeying from sunup to sunup at suspected pilfering and shoplifting.

Suspected? Yeah. The cops didn't have a sheet on Arnie Fowler.

But the fat boy was a street kid, looked as if he hadn't missed too many meals—and smoked grass. He hadn't even got uptight when asked. Some people drink water, some people smoke marijuana. Arnie Fowler hated water, liked grass.

Okay. Everyone to his pleasure—except, you don't get grass at the grocery store or out of a vending machine. And grass costs. So where does the kid get money for his habit? He works part time for Tex Long—and he picks up a coin or two here and there elsewhere—like from a cash register in a newsstand.

"Joe," interrupted Shayne, "I walked in on the boy and patted him down. No knife, no money from the till."

"Uh-huh," admitted Brock. "So it reads here in the package. Sorta gives the kid a leg up, doesn't it?"

"Which means maybe cops sniff in another direction?"

"Like what, Mike?"

"There was a folded newspaper under the counter."

"That right? Henderson didn't mention it in his report. But why would he? A newsstand is loaded with newspapers."

Shayne explained and Joe Brock listened patiently. Then Brock said, "Doodling is always interesting, Mike. Some say it gives an insight into a man. Probably applies here. Long was a guy with sharp eyes and a sixth sense, a man who would study newspaper photographs of wanted people. Hell, it was his main business. He kept abreast of those kinds of things. He probably penciled in contemplation."

"Maybe," Shayne suggested. Then he added bluntly, "But tell me that digging a guy's eyes from his head is a simple street killing, Joe."

"Okay, there's that," Brock replied after a brief hesitation. "In my book, it gives Arnie Fowler a second leg up." Brock hesitated again, then said, "Somebody out of Long's past got him, Mike, someone he blew on at one time or another. In this case, maybe, it was somebody Long saw. He passed it along, a guy is nailed, the guy serves time, but he doesn't forget Tex, and eventually he returns. That kind of thing has to be one of the hazards of being an informer, right?"

"Sort of out of the old Mafia

days, you mean?" Shayne replied, sarcasm lacing the words. "A stoolie is found dead with a canary stuffed in his mouth?"

"How come you're so nasty this morning? The drizzle?"

"Is Will Gentry around?" Shayne countered.

There was a long silence on the line this time before Brock said flatly, "The word we have is the Chief went out on his boat at noon yesterday and is not expected to return before Sunday evening. Look—Long was wasted. It wasn't Arnie Fowler, it wasn't anybody off the street, the empty cash register be damned. That was an attempt at cover, probably a last-second thought. Long was hit by someone he once pin-pointed, Mike. That's how we're playing it."

"Which has arrows on it, Joe—pointing straight to the unsolved file!"

Brock groaned. "Mike, cool it, huh? Forget this one. We'll—"

Shayne slammed his phone down on the words. He stood up and padded to the window, stared on the drizzle of the day without seeing it. There was a tight feeling in his gut. The cops seemed to be damned blasé about Long's murder, almost too blasé. There were undercurrents that smelled.

Were the cops simply treating the murder too lightly, or

were they attempting to clamp a lid on the death? If a lid was being screwed down—*why?* What was there about the murder that was bigger than the death itself?

The redhead returned to the phone, dialed the *Daily News* and asked for Tim Rourke, the veteran crime reporter and a friend of long standing. But it was Saturday, and Rourke did not show on Saturdays. Except when something big was working. And there was nothing big this Saturday.

Shayne muttered a silent oath. He knew Rourke's schedule—he had simply forgotten it was a Saturday. He pressed anyway.

The murder of a guy named Tex Long? Yeah, somebody at the *Daily News* was doing a piece on that, but it was nothing to roust Rourke for. It was simply another street jobbie, some poor bastard hit while locking up his joint for the night, the killer probably getting less than fifty bucks out of the cash register. Rousting Rourke on a Saturday to do that kind of piece would be tantamount to stealing his bottle of rye. There'd be another killing.

Shayne dialed Rourke's apartment number. No answer. He lighted a cigarette, stood scowling. He seemed to be up-

tight without reason. The *Daily News* had the story, so he was wrong about the police lid. Cops could have conveniently stashed the Long homicide report in a wrong drawer, or they could have requested *Daily News* cooperation.

"We're asking that you not print the story at this time; printing it could be injurious to our investigation, hazardous to other parties."

The cops would have gotten *Daily News* cooperation.

Okay then, no lid. And a private eye could be reading too much into the routine of a homicide file, the words, attitude and thinking of a bright young cop who had caught the weekend trick when he'd much prefer to be curled up cozily with his pretty wife on a gloomy Saturday morning.

Plus—the popped eyes could have been what the cops were figuring, the work of a sadist-avenger. The penciled beard on the photograph of Ross Deidler in a newspaper could have been contemplation, pure speculation by a man who made his bread speculating. Nothing to get excited about or include in a police report.

Add—a shamus who did not have a client—or an ax to grind. The shamus had been acquainted with Tex Long, informer, yeah. But that's where

it ended. No close tie, nothing to send a shamus out hell-bent on vengeance.

Shayne rambled restlessly around the apartment most of that wet Saturday. There was some file cleaning at his office to be done, one cabinet of files that made his efficient secretary, Lucy Hamilton, wince everytime she had occasion to open one of the drawers, but very important files to the redhead because nothing was categorized and he knew exactly where everything was—and one of the drawers contained a bottle of Martell.

Occasionally, of course, the file became too packed and needed thinning. Like now. On the other hand, he was not in the mood for sorting and pitch-ing.

Late in the afternoon, the jangle of his telephone caught Shayne in the shower. Knotting a large towel around his flat middle, he padded to the instrument and picked up the handset.

"Rourke," said the familiar voice. "I'm at the office. Got a note here. It says, 'Mike Shayne called you. Shayne is tightass about the Tex Long killing. Perhaps you should pursue.' End of message. It's signed by a Saturday editor."

Rourke paused, then added, "Saturday and Sunday editors

are one notch above copy boys during the week but the Lord's own special creations on weekends. Should I get excited, Mike? Have in mind that this is a Saturday and I just left a gluttonous and tireless blonde, so my excitement level is a bit low."

The banter meant nothing. Shayne knew Rourke's nose for news was twitching. He laid out Tex Long's death, the happenings of the last eighteen hours, then added his own uneasy suspicions.

Rourke was crisp when he asked, "And what about Will Gentry?"

"Out on his boat for the weekend, Brock says."

"Okay, I'll cruise over to the cop-shop and see what I can learn. With Henderson punching the buttons, it could be a fantasied Second Coming, of course, then again . . ."

Rourke let the words hang, then continued, "Last Sunday's DRA story, Mike, nothing local in that. It was a wire piece, an Associated Press feature. We get them by the dozens for various releases, photos included. For every one we use, we throw four away. Some Sunday editor in the house is fascinated by the Deidler bunch—or the piece fills a hole for him—so he uses it. If Deidler and his crowd are in town, it'd be happenstance,

but a helluva story. *I'd* like to run into it!"

Rourke telephoned again around six o'clock. His voice was flat as he reported, "Nothing, Mike. Everything looks in order at the cop-shop. No coverup. Long's package is open for digging if a man wants to dig. And Joe Brock will gab if a man wants to bend an ear. The cops are looking for somebody out of Long's past, some goon who was released from prison in the last couple of weeks or so. You like?"

Shayne scowled, ran a thumbnail along the reddish stubble of his jawline. "Yeah, maybe I have to—in spite of a gut feeling."

"Un-huh," Rourke replied. But it was not a statement. He was waiting. Shayne said nothing, hung there silently, not having a thing to say.

Rourke drew a long breath. "Okay, friend, file this number." He rattled off a phone number. "It belongs to my blonde friend. I'm here. We each have Sunday off work, too. But I'm available—in case your gut feeling gets the best of you. Got it?"

Shayne grunted as he filed the phone number in the back of his skull. The real Rourke had come out. Rourke wanted a story and he'd make any sacrifice to get it, including a

choice blonde. Rourke was that kind of reporter.

"See you, Tim," said the detective.

"One more little tidbit, Mike," Rourke put in. "The kid, Arnie Fowler? He's to be freed tonight, Brock says, probably has been by now."

Shayne put the phone together, went to the wet window, stared out on the gray evening. Rourke's report could have been salve. It hadn't been.

He felt restless. His feet would not remain still, his nerve ends were flicking around like gnats drawn to lamplight. He thought about calling Lucy Hamilton. They'd have dinner, a couple of drinks. But Lucy had gone to a weekend art show in Lauderdale.

And Rourke obviously was busy.

Gentry was on his boat somewhere out in the Atlantic.

So it left?

The Martell. A cozy companion on a wet night.

His morning feeling had been right. It had been a rough day. No action, the worst kind of day.

IV

SHAYNE GOT OUT a fresh bottle of cognac and took it with the jug of refrigerated water and



two glasses to his favorite chair. He poured cognac into one glass, ice water into the other. Then he sat back, rested his head and closed his eyes, a glass cupped in each huge hand.

Every so often a night for two-fisted drinking came along. He was with his. Tex Long's slaying belonged to the cops. They needed a murderer, and they were looking for one. Someone, somewhere, probably had seen the killer enter and leave the newsstand. Gumshoeing, knocking on doors, flushing a neighborhood, quizzing those who had been on the streets Friday night—eventually would produce that person. The cops had the manpower for that kind of detecting. A lone eye didn't.

But the eye had two glasses—one in each hand. And

he had the ingredients to refill those glasses. In this venture, an eye did not need assistance.

It rained on Sunday, a steady, penetrating rain. It was an ideal rain for all of the assorted green things that came out of the ground. The rain also made it a helluva good day to clean out files. But in his Flagler Street office, Shayne sat slumped in the chair behind his desk and moodily listened to the silence around him.

One filing cabinet drawer had been opened. From it, he had taken the bottle of cognac and a clean glass. Some of the cognac was now in that glass. Hair of the dog. He was nursing a mild hangover—slowly.

The telephone startled him. He snapped his head around and frowned at the phone. It was four o'clock on a Sunday, and he had not told anyone he planned to be in his office.

He swept up the phone on the fourth ring and jammed it into his shoulder. "Mike Shayne Investigations," he gravedled.

"Will Gentry," said the voice in his ear.

The detective sat up and swung into his desk, instantly alert. Gentry sounded terse, unhappy—like someone who had been yanked from his boat hours before he was due in a marina.

"I've called every damn Sun-

day watering hole in the city looking for you," said Gentry. "This was a longshot."

"So longshots sometimes pay," countered the redhead, cradling the phone between ear and shoulder and lighting a cigaret.

"This Tex Long thing," continued Gentry. "We turned the boy, Arnie Fowler, loose last night."

"Okay. So you turned him loose."

"And we no longer have a hold on the body. The funeral is in the morning."

"Yeah? Who's handling the arrangements?"

"Clifford Rose."

"Clifford Rose for Tex Long?"

"He apparently buries commoners, too, Mike. But the point is—the kid is no longer a suspect, Tex is to be buried tomorrow morning, and we'll eventually come up with the killer. We'll find him down there in the neighborhood somewhere. So that ends it for you."

"Ends what, Will?"

"Your interest, dammit!"

Shayne frowned, tugged his earlobe, said, "I've got an interest, Will?"

"Cut the bull, Mike! Never in your life have you stumbled over a corpse that didn't interest you. But I'm telling you here and now—in this case,

forget it! You never even saw Tex Long dead!"

"That right? Who's leaning on you?"

There was a pause at the opposite end of the line, then Gentry growled, "See you around, Mike."

Shayne took the handset of the suddenly dead phone from his shoulder, held it out and looked at it, then dropped it in its cradle. He hunched over his desk, smoked rapidly.

Coverup! And by Will Gentry. Why?

V

MONDAY WAS designed for mourning. Light rain shrouded the cemetery. Shayne stood alone at one end of the long canopy. He was just inside, out of the wet that glistened the grass behind him, hat brim pulled low over narrowed grey eyes, craggy face set, hands shoved deep into the pockets of his trench coat as he surveyed the scene.

Ahead of him were five possible mourners, a minister, a funeral home representative and a cop. Henderson stood directly opposite a woman in black who had a gloved hand hooked into the cocked elbow of the immaculately dressed Clifford Rose emissary. The minister was at the head of the

grave, looking straight back at the detective. But Shayne suspected the minister wasn't seeing anything as he concentrated on clear enunciation.

A tall man joined Shayne. The detective stole a quick oblique glance. He hadn't heard Tim Rourke approach on the velvety grass.

"Tim," Shayne mumbled, talking out of the side of his mouth.

"Mike, is that a grieving widow I see? I didn't know Tex—"

"Not a widow, as you damn well know, Tim," Shayne cut in. "And not especially grieved, if you'll look closely. Witness the set of her face, the thrust of jaw. This is serious business with her, and I'll wager she's picking up the Clifford Rose tab, but she's in no danger of drowning in grief and tears. I wonder who she is?"

"Looking for a client, Mike?" Rourke asked sagely.

Shayne ignored the question, took in Henderson, the boy Arnie Fowler, who still wore the purple tank shirt and the scruffy jeans. To the boy's right was a modish young man in a wheelchair. He looked in his late twenties. His long hair was styled. He looked expensively dressed, even in a raincoat. His shoes carried a high polish, and he wore a large diamond ring

on the little finger of his right hand.

"Know him?" Rourke low-toned, his gaze following the detective's.

"Nope, but I saw him arrive in the waiting cab back there on the drive."

"Interesting dude," mused Rourke. "For one thing, what's a guy in his twenties doing in a wheelchair? Did he get that via war, accident or birth? For another, he doesn't look as if the chair has been too much of an anchor. Those threads didn't come out of a discount house. Catch the high-heeled shoes, Mike. Those dogs cost.

"He looks about fourteen cuts above Tex Long's social circle. So what's his tie to Long? How come he's out here in the rain in a wheelchair to see Long—a guy almost three times his age, incidentally—put into the ground?"

"Don't know, Tim," said Shayne, noticing that Arnie Fowler had turned to the crippled man. The boy said something, the man nodded, then continued to look around. It was the looking that tweaked the detective. The man had been observing since his arrival, his attention to the service perfunctory.

There was another observer, too, a man who stood near the foot of the grave and slightly

apart from the others. He was medium of stature and cut of clothing, without any distinguishing features of physique. He stood quietly and could be anyone—a schoolteacher, salesman, a newspaper distributor. Or perhaps he sold caskets and had come out to check the leakproofness of his boxes.

Shayne hunched slightly and turned his eyes to the Negro woman. She wore a yellow slicker that might have come from a Goodwill station and her rundown shoes were dark with wetness. But she seemed to be the only genuine mourner. Her large eyes were wet and her thick lips trembled as she listened raptly to the words intoned by the minister.

"Who is *she*?" asked Rourke.

"Fry cook and friend," grunted the detective.

When the service was finished, the woman in black left immediately with the Clifford Rose representative and the minister. They got into a long black car and glided away.

Arnie Fowler flicked a hand at Shayne, looked as if he wanted to say something, then decided against it. He pushed the man in the wheelchair across the grass to the cab. Shayne watched the latter deftly lift himself from the chair and into the back seat of the

cab. The man reached out, folded the chair and pulled it inside. He started to yank shut the door, then motioned Arnie Fowler inside. The boy scrambled.

Henderson walked off without giving the detective a glance, got into a city car. The other man also walked alone. He rolled out of sight in a small tan sedan that could have come off any used car lot.

Shayne stared after the sedan. Mr. Medium—*too* medium, dammit. There was something about the guy . . .

"Mike—over by my car," said Rourke.

The Negro woman stood beside the vehicle. She acted as if she wanted to walk away, but could not. She backed a couple of steps as Shayne and Rourke approached. Then she reached down inside her middle-aged body somewhere and summoned courage.

"You one of them newspaper gents?" she asked, looking straight at Rourke. "I seen you drive up in this here car and it's got a sign on it. I mean, that sign there on the front door. It says *Daily News*, the newspaper—"

She halted the words and Rourke turned on a one-sided grin as he opened the car door. "Yes, I work for the newspaper," he said, his tone and man-

ner designed to seek confidence. "My name is Tim Rourke. Want to get inside out of the rain?" He made a point of looking around. "I notice you don't have a car or a waiting cab."

The woman backed another step. "No, don't want to get inside. Rain don't matter. Already wet. And I never owned a car in my life, mister. I walked out here, I can walk back. Don't hafta be to work before three s'afternoon anyhow."

"Cooking?" Shayne put in.

She flashed him a hard look. "Tha's right, mister—cooking. Folks have to eat, some folks got to cook. I been doin' it forty years. Who're you?"

"I'm with *him*," said Shayne, thumbing Rourke.

"No, you ain't," said the woman, stubbornly shaking her head. "I seen you drive up, too. You drivin' them big wheels over there." She waved an arm to the Buick. "How you know I cook?"

"You cooked a special meal for Tex on his fifty-eighth birthday last Friday night."

"Lordy, *didn't* I!" she said, nodding. "And it was his last meal, the way it turned out." She became suspicious again. "How do you know about that?"

"My name is Mike Shayne. I'm a private detective. I knew Tex."

The woman looked surprised.

"You Mr. Shayne? Lordy, I declare! Mr. Tex, he sometimes talked about you. Sometimes good, sometimes bad—but most times good, mister. Honest, Mr. Tex, he said you were okay. And you was one of them detective fellas, huh? Then maybe you can tell me what I gotta know. Who done busted up Mr. Tex's place? I thought maybe this here newspaper fella might've heard from the fuzz, but maybe you know—huh, Mr. Shayne?"

VI

SHAYNE FLICKED Rourke a glance and caught the reporter with eyebrows lifted. Rourke shrugged enough to tell Shayne he didn't know what the woman was talking about.

"We haven't heard about a break-in," Shayne said, fishing. "Tell us about it."

Her name was Callie Bush, and she and Mr. Tex had been living in rooms next door to each other for years. They were friends. Mr. Tex was a good man and sometimes, late at night after she got home from the fry joint where she cooked from three to midnight, they'd have a beer together, sit with their shoes off, wiggling tired bare toes, and have a cold bottle of beer.

But last Friday night—well,

that was going to be kind of special, because it was Mr. Tex's birthday and she'd cooked him a special plate over where she worked. Later that night they were going to get together in her place because she had managed to buy a whole six-pack of beer that day and . . . well, she and Mr. Tex had planned to drink all of the six-pack, sort of in celebration of his birthday.

Trouble was, Mr. Tex had done got himself killed. She'd heard about it while still at work. Word about the killing had swept the neighborhood. She'd immediately had the miseries, couldn't work anymore, so she'd gone to her place sometime between ten-thirty and eleven o'clock, and she'd been sitting there alone in her place with her shoes off and her bare toes wiggling and the miseries on her hard, and she'd been working on a second bottle of beer—thinking about Mr. Tex and unable to believe—when she'd heard the noise next door in his place.

At first, she'd thought it was Mr. Tex's ghost back packing or something, but then she'd come to her senses as the slamming around inside Mr. Tex' room got louder. She had wanted to go over there, see what was going on, but she was scared almost white, and it'd

been all she could do to get down the hallway to the phone and call the fuzz. The police, when they finally arrived, had found a light on, the room a mess and a window open.

"Callie," said Shayne, taking her arm, "I'll drive you home."

"Tain't that far," she protested.

"Only eight to ten miles. What time did you get up this morning to walk here?"

"Came from work and waited."

Most of the other people at the funeral had been strangers. She didn't know Henderson, the cop, or Mr. Medium or the minister or the funeral parlor man or the woman in black. The boy was Spot, that was the only name she knew, he lived in the neighborhood. Sometimes he helped Mr. Tex at the newsstand. Mr. Tex always said Spot was a good kid, maybe had a little laziness in his bones and maybe some empty spots between his ears—she'd never quite understood what Mr. Tex had meant when he said that—but Spot was okay.

The man in the wheelchair?

His name was Buckwald. That's all she'd ever heard. He lived in the neighborhood, too, been there a couple of years or so, wrote books or something, Mr. Tex said, she wasn't sure.

But he was in Mr. Tex's place a lot, looking at the magazines and things. Buckwald was a fancy dude, wore fancy clothes, wasn't like the others on their streets. Buckwald didn't sweat bill collectors, he didn't have any, but Mr. Tex said Buckwald was okay, just different than other folks.

Buckwald once had been a Society Cat, but after the airplane crash where he got hurt, his own folks didn't want much to do with him, so he had come to the neighborhood where he didn't bother no one and no one paid him no mind. That's what Mr. Tex said . . .

The building manager was hesitant about opening Tex Long's room to inspection because the cops had told him to keep it locked and not disturb anything until he got the okay from them. He was not happy about the situation, because he wanted to clean out the joint and rent it again. He was losing bread, but that's the way it was.

Callie Bush snorted. "Mr. Mike here is a *detective*," she said.

The building manager opened up immediately. Shayne prowled the room while Rourke, the manager and Callie Bush filled the doorway. The place had been ransacked and was littered—open bureau drawers,

knifed mattress, closet shelf swept clean, old cartons and paper scattered on the warped hardwood floor, a few pieces of clothing pitched here and there.

Someone had been semi-thorough. But it had not been simple vandalism—no epitaphs scribbled on the walls, a half pot of cold coffee still on a burner in a corner, beer, ketchup and a browned head of lettuce, plus a few odds and ends of other foods still in the leaning refrigerator.

Shayne went to the single window, opened it, stuck his head outside. A drain pipe within easy reach ran straight down to the alley two floors below.

He pulled his head inside, closed the window, stood surveying the room again. Something was missing. He frowned, the lines etched deep across his forehead. It was difficult to pinpoint in the litter, but he knew something was missing. He had the feeling in his bones.

At Callie Bush's door, he passed her a fifty-dollar bill. She glanced down at it, then stared at him. "I owed Tex," he said gruffly. "I figure he would want you to have it."

"If I'd had it this mornun, mister, I'd have bought some flowers," she said simply.

"Tex wasn't a flower man, Callie," the detective countered.

She continued to stare at him for a few seconds. And then she said, "You right, Mr. Mike."

Shayne gave her a quick, one-sided grin. He felt as if a barrier had been dropped. With Callie Bush, he now was in the Tex Long category.

Going down the steps, Rourke said, "Somebody sure did a job on the room, Mike." "Un-huh," the detective grunted from behind a scowl. He lighted a cigarette, sucked on it. "But the newsstand wasn't torn up. How come?"

Rourke said nothing.

"Tex is knocked off in his store," Shayne continued. "So if the killer is after something he thinks Tex has, why not tear up the store? Why only his room—and a couple of hours after he's dead? Why wouldn't the killer come straight here after hitting Tex? Hell, it's only a block, and he knows Tex is dead. But Tex is hit sometime between eight-thirty and nine-thirty and, according to Callie, she didn't hear noise here until after eleven. There's a time lag, Tim, and it stinks. Plus . . ."

Shayne let the words hang as he used finger and thumb of his left hand to rub his right ear-lobe.

"Yeah?" prodded Rourke.

"In my book, a ransacked room, somebody looking for something, shoots holes in the

cop theory that Tex's killer was somebody recently out of the slammer. A dude out for revenge is going to kill and disappear.

"Unless the guy was looking for a stake," Rourke offered.

"No." Shayne shook his head. "He'd have ripped up the newsstand."

They were at the front door. Shayne slapped a large palm against the glass to push the door open, then froze. Outside it was raining harder. But it was the polished grey limousine braked at the curbing across the street that held him. There was a chauffeur at the wheel of the limousine. He sat straight and profiled. The detective could not see anyone in the back seat, but he knew eyes were watching.

"Ugh!" grunted Rourke. "That heap is about as inconspicuous over there as I'd be at a convention of midgets."

VII

"SHAYNE?" It was a question.

A back door of the limousine opened as Mike Shayne and Tim Rourke trotted down the front steps of the dilapidated building. A young man vacated the car. He stood in the street with the car door closed behind him. He was bareheaded and very dapper looking, even in



the rain. He stood with hands shoved deep into the pockets of an expensive looking coat. He was waiting.

Shayne knew that he could turn down the sidewalk and head for his Buick, but he'd never get inside without the young man being at his elbow. He also knew the young man probably would become very insistent, very persuasive.

"Shayne?" the young man repeated.

Shayne and Rourke started across the street, but the young man called out, "Not you, Mr. Rourke—split!" The young man remained quite polite.

"Cicerone," breathed Rourke.

"Un-huh," grunted Shayne, shooting his cigaret off to fizzle in a pool of water. "Fade, Tim."

He went across the street in long strides. The young man was smiling as he waited. It was a frozen smile, pasted on. And he didn't move. He had the car door blocked. "The heat," he said.

Shayne snaked a hand inside his coat, brought out the .45. The young man took the gun, nodded, made it disappear almost instantly into his coat pocket, then walked around the rear of the car and went up on the sidewalk. He placed himself in a doorway, out of the rain, but kept a clear view of the street.

Shayne ducked and got into the rear of the limousine. The back of the front seat had been opened to a tiny bar. The suave man who waited for the detective smiled and lifted a hand. "You'll find Martell, Shayne. Nasty day, isn't it?"

Antonio Cicerone was in his late sixties, trim and manicured, a calm man. He was also a man of many cloths, all of them expansive and expensive. Among other things, he was an investor, bank director, contractor, president of a giant conglomerate that developed recreation areas along the Gulf Coast—and the biggest live mobster in all of the Southeast U.S. of A.

Shayne put an immaculately clean glass on the tiny tray in

front of him and found the right flask. He poured, lifted the glass in salute. "Antonio."

Cicerone said, "We were at the cemetery this morning."

The detective nodded. "Figures, or you wouldn't know where to find me."

"I'm interested in the death of this Tex Long."

"You didn't know Tex?"

Cicerone shook his silver-topped head. "We've heard of him, of course, and perhaps we should have been paying some attention to him through the years, but we haven't. He hasn't been that important. A two-bitter, and he's walked on eggshells around my associates. But suddenly he has taken on stature."

Shayne tasted the cognac and lifted a shaggy eyebrow at the mobster. "Yeah?"

Cicerone's face was dead, but his eyes were bright and alive. "The cops are uptight. Long's death is supposed to be a routine street job, some knife man with a beef who has been away for a while. But the cops are nervous, and they are lying. Long's departure is bigger—big enough to attract Feds."

"Aha!" grunted Shayne. A couple of things fell into place. He nodded, finished the cognac perfunctorily, put the glass on the tray.

Then he looked Antonio

Cicerone straight in the eye. "I didn't know about the Feds."

Cicerone took an envelope from an inside coat pocket, passed it to Shayne. "Five thou. I want to know why the Feds are in town."

Shayne shook his head. "Quit it, Antonio. I've got a reputation. It's important to me, to my business. And Will Gentry is a friend, in addition to being a confidant. If you think I'm going to breach—"

"Shayne," interrupted Cicerone, "guys who will sell out are ten cents a pack. Would I bother to be outdoors on such a lousy day to track down a dimer?"

Shayne continued to look the mobster straight in the eye for another few seconds, and then he tucked the five thousand dollars in his inside coat pocket.

"The Feds and this Tex Long thing," continued Cicerone, nodding in satisfaction at the detective's decision, "it's a package. That much we do know. But that's *all* we know. I don't care if you don't go within ten miles of Gentry and/or police headquarters. We're covered there. But outside?"

He cut off the words, leaned forward, made a point of looking across the detective and out the window. "For instance, this neighborhood, over there across

the street, the Negro woman you brought here from the cemetery. You were inside twenty-two minutes when you could have let her out of your car at the curb. You also had Tim Rourke with you. Okay, so maybe she *is* an acquaintance, you boys saw her safely to her door. I don't know, I don't give a damn about knowing—unless she's got something to do with why the Feds are in town.

"See, Shayne? We try to keep abreast of things, know what's going on here and there, but we've got our shadow areas, too, places and people we don't know about, can't get to. That's what the five thou is buying. You dig in the shadows."

Shayne left the limousine. Cicerone's bodyguard was with him, passed back the .45. The redhead jammed the gun into the shoulder rig—and marched to his Buick. Inside, he sat slouched behind the steering wheel, drumming fingers against the wheel and staring at the rain-streaked windshield without seeing it.

Federal interest in Tex Long's death? Enough to lean on the local police? Why were they leaning? Because of a man named Ross Deidler? Deidler's Revolutionary Command?

Deidler was a shadow, too—an elusive shadow.

The detective began to drum

his fingers as he visualized the folded newspaper he had spotted under the counter in the newsstand, the newspaper photographs, the penciled beard on a mystery man named Deidler. Had Tex's doodling been idle play—as the cops wanted him to think—or had it been for real?

Was it possible Tex had spotted Ross Deidler in his newsstand—a *bearded* Ross Deidler?

Shayne grabbed the steering wheel, picked up the car phone and called the *Daily News*. Rourke had just got in, but he'd been there long enough to talk to a police reporter who was doing a routine follow-up on the Tex Long killing. The police had added another sheet to their Long file. His room had been ransacked, the ransacking turned in by a couple of car boys who filed a late report after answering a routine call.

But add to that—because of Homicide interest, a second inspection of the room had been made by Detective Henderson, who had reported finding a will. The will had led police to a bank safety-deposit box where, with a court order, they had found \$82,000 in cash. Under the simple stipulation of the will, the cash was to go to a children's home in the city.

Add to that—Rourke curiosi-

ty. Rourke had been curious about the arrangements made for Tex Long. Clifford Rose Funeral Homes buried the Social Register—but Clifford Rose had also buried Tex Long, a newsstand operator. Who paid?

After being waved off by an Antonio Cicerone bodyguard, Rourke had stopped at a public phone booth, made a call and said he wanted to pay the tab for the Tex Long burial, but he needed to know the amount. A polite secretary had asked him to hold for a few minutes while she checked the records. She had returned to the phone and professed to be a bit confused. The Long account already was in order. It had been taken care of by a daughter, a Miss Nancy Oxford.

"You get an address for her?" Shayne asked bluntly.

"Ocean View Tower. Suite Seven. That's pretty fancy turf, Mike—especially for a daughter of Tex Long, an informer. Skeletons in the closet are interesting, aren't they? I'll meet you there."

Ocean View Tower was tall and white. A few years earlier, the same design might have contained only four small windows up high and been dropped in a sea off some coast line. It would have been called a lighthouse.

Ocean View Tower was

dropped in one of Miami's more affluent neighborhoods, had many windows and was a testimony to modern architecture. Suite Seven was on the second floor. And Miss Nancy Oxford was receiving—hesitantly, but she opened her front door because she was curious.

She was 35 to 40 years of age, plain, clean, alone, still in black, and did not understand all this interest in her father's death. Oh, certainly, he had been the victim of murder, but she had already been quizzed by an agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and now she had a private detective and a newspaperman on her threshold. Why?

She squeezed brown eyes at Shayne and Rourke again. "You two also were at the service." Her brow creased. "I simply do not understand this interest."

"The FBI agent didn't tell you?" countered Shayne.

Forehead furrows deepened. "No," she said slowly. "Mr. Mitchell seemed interested only in my relationship with my father. When I explained to him why my father and I had been eons apart practically all of my life, it seemed to satisfy him and he departed."

She paused, shook her head. "Actually, I am a bit put out with Mr. Mitchell. He could

have explained, at least, why—

"Your father, Miss Oxford," Shayne cut in, "was more than a mere newsstand operator. He was what we call an informer. He sold information about other people for a price. On the other hand, he apparently was closed-mouth about himself. For instance, it is not general knowledge among his acquaintances that you, a daughter, exist."

She nodded. "Perhaps that part is understandable, Mr. Shayne. Until approximately a year ago, I didn't know *my father* existed. I was reared by my mother and her husband and told that my father had been killed in a war."

Her mother had been Samantha Horton, a socialite. On her cancerous death bed eleven months earlier, Samantha Horton had suffered pangs of guilt and confessed. Once her name had been Samantha Oxford, once Samantha Oxford and Tex Long—reared on the same back streets, in the same schools—had cohabited. A daughter had been born, but there had been no marriage because a Texford Long had disappeared.

Samantha had managed to pull up her boot straps and found a job as a secretary that eventually led to her marriage to the company president, Les-

ter Horton. For reasons of their own, they had concocted a war-death father for Samantha's illegitimate daughter. Then Texford Long had suddenly surfaced again. He had seen Samantha's picture in the newspaper society columns several times, and he finally phoned Samantha.

"And?" pressed Shayne.

"Even then mother did not tell me about father. She waited until she was dying."

"And?"

Nancy Oxford looked Shayne straight in the eye. "I went to see father. He was surprised, then embarrassed, I think. But . . ." She paused, shook her head as if confused. "I never was able to get close to him. He wouldn't let me."

"Are you employed, Miss Oxford?" Shayne asked bluntly.

The eyebrows lifted again. "Yes," she nodded. "I am the director of a foundation, one of my stepfather's many projects. It is a foundation to assist children—orphans, those who have been abandoned, those who . . ."

"Un-huh," grunted the detective, "Are you aware the foundation is eighty-two thousand dollars richer today, or will be soon?"

"No."

"Your father left that amount to a children's home."

She looked totally startled. "B-But where—where would he get—"

"A trusted informer, Miss Oxford, can accumulate over the years," said Shayne. Then he added, "Do you know any of the people who attended the funeral this morning?"

"No." She shook her head. "Of course, since the service, Mr. Mitchell has been here and introduced himself, and now you and Mr. Rourke—"

"But out there at the cemetery, everyone was a stranger, huh?"

"Yes."

"This Mitchell ask you the same question?"

She looked startled. "Well, yes. Now that I think about it, he did."

Shayne ran a thumbnail along his jawline. Then he flipped the hat in his hand a couple of times and said, "Miss Oxford, I'm not going to give you any peace of mind, either. I don't know *why* the FBI is investigating the death of your father. Thank you for seeing us."

"One moment, Mr. Shayne!" she protested. "Why are *you*, a private detective, investigating? I don't understand that, either!"

He said flatly, "Because I've been paid to. By whom is not important. You are not involved. Concentrate on your

kids, take care of them. When all of this is finished, I'll come around and fill you in."

The detective departed quickly, Rourke behind him. The reporter remained silent until they were outside Ocean View Tower. Then he hunched against the drizzle of the day and said, "She's clean and confused, Mike, that's it?"

"It," said Shayne.

"The Feds? You weren't surprised."

"Cicerone."

"Yeah?" Rourke cupped a cigarette against the rain, lighted it, waited.

"His line at Headquarters says the FBI is in, but that's where it ends. The line is plugged. And if Antonio's line is plugged, that means the cork has been stuffed from the top, the top being—as we both know—Will Gentry, whom I wouldn't go near, at the moment, if he were my mother. Antonio wants shadows explored. So I'm exploring. Nancy Oxford was one of those shadows."

Rourke pinched his nose in thought. "I wonder how Mitchell found out about the daughter."

"Probably the same way you did, Tim. I have a hunch he was at the funeral—and I don't think he was sitting in a wheelchair."



VIII

SHAYNE LEFT THE newspaperman standing in the drizzle, staring after him. He got into the Buick and cruised to the newsstand area. There he eased up and down the wet streets slowly, looking for Arnie Fowler. He wanted a line on a man named Buckwald.

The fat boy was not in sight. Shayne returned to the newsstand, braked out front. The stand was closed, no lights inside. The only sign of life was a lanky Anglo youth, who stood on one foot inside the recessed entry and out of the rain, the

other foot and his body braced against the building.

The youth eyed the Buick briefly, then dropped his propped foot and moved out. Shayne watched him go. He scowled. The youth was hustling, almost running.

The detective's thoughts were interrupted by the appearance of Arnie Fowler. The fat boy came out of a side street and around a corner of the newsstand. He started down the street after the hustling Anglo youth, then seemed to notice the Buick. He stopped dead.

Shayne rolled down a window and yelled, "*Come here, Spot!*" He had the thought he might have been yelling at a dog.

The boy hesitated at the door of the Buick, then plopped inside. He flashed a yellow-toothed grin. "Hiya, Mr. Shayne."

"Who's the kid hustling down the street?" asked the detective.

Arnie Fowler squeezed his eyes to stare through the rain-sluiced windshield. "Him? Cat Man. He's a flake."

"Cat Man?"

Arnie Fowler waved a fat hand. "He slides around a lot, in and out, here and there, now you see him, now you don't—one of them kind. So he's Cat Man. He's got lofty ideas about being a pimp. He ain't. His main profession is standing

around, holding up buildings. How come you wanna know about him?"

Shayne ignored the question, dug out a crumpled pack of cigarettes. Spot still wore the purple tank shirt and the faded jeans. Both were plastered against his damp body and gave off a strong marijuana odor.

Shayne flicked a cigaret at him. "Something straight?"

"Don't use 'em, man. Ain't good for the health, you know."

Shayne lighted up. "You know Tex had a daughter?"

Arnie Fowler sobered instantly, stared through the windshield without seeing anything. "Naw."

Shayne smoked, waited, said nothing. The boy squirmed.

"Look . . ."

He clamped his lips, switched his eyes to the detective. "Okay, you found out," he said flatly. "So?"

"Big secret, huh?"

Arnie Fowler said, "That's how Tex wanted it, man. He only told me because—well, hell, I was his friend. He could trust me. And he needed someone to . . .

"Look, Tex knew he could find bit trouble someday. He knew there was the chance some hammer would come along and blow him sometime. If that ever happened, which it

did last Friday night, he wanted this cat to know. So he swore me to secrecy—if the word ever got back to him I'd bleated about her, he'd nail me to a wall like Christ to the Cross, is the way he said it—and told me to pass the word to her if he ever got hit."

"Or just had a heart attack on a street corner."

"Which is what I did. The bulls had to let me use a phone. I got my rights, you know. Only I didn't call no shyster, I called her."

"Every man confides in someone, somewhere," mused Shayne, nodding and smoking. Then he said, "Okay, Spot, who's Buckwald? What's his thing?"

The boy looked surprised.

"I got his background from Callie Bush," the detective went on with a wave of his cigaret. "But where do I find him? He and Tex were special friends?"

"Naw, naw," said the boy. "Nothing special. Buckwald was in the store a lot, that's all."

"Which prompted him to attend the funeral today?"

"I dunno," said Spot.

"Buckwald was only a customer?"

"Yeah."

"Where does he live?"

"Got a pad on Twelfth. That's

the next street down; around the corner. I can show you."

It was a squat apartment building, squeezed between a dingy wineshop and a second-hand women's store. Buckwald's door was at the back of the building on the ground floor. No one answered Shayne's demanding knuckles.

Spot offered, "Super lives up front."

The building superintendent, a gnarled man in faded khaki trousers and a grey undershirt, said Buckwald had gone away in a cab an hour earlier.

Outside, Shayne pressed Spot again. "Tex working on anything special the last week or so?"

"I dunno what you're talking about, man."

Shayne sighed. He gave the boy a hard look.

Spot shuffled in the drizzle. "Hey, I don't know nothing," he said. "I mean, yeah, me'n Tex, we was special friends, kinda. He told me 'bout his daughter he had, but about his—well, business. Man, he never told me nothing!"

"I spotted a newspaper under the counter the other night," Shayne said. He described the pictures.

"Could be Tex was on to something," Spot said. "I dunno. Radicals? In from out of town? Man, what's a radical?"

Shayne left the boy standing in the rain and cruised slowly out of the neighborhood. He felt as if he was running in thigh-deep water. He managed to get a foot up, get it down again, bring the other foot forward. But he was making damned little progress. Cicerone wanted shadows explored. Hell, he couldn't even find the shadows.

He stopped at a small bar. It was a neighborhood place, cozy and featuring quiet in the late afternoon hours. There were two other customers.

He nursed the cognac and absentedly fingered the ice water chaser. A shadow took a stool to his left, ordered a glass of beer. He paid for the beer with exact change, waited for the bartender to fade, then said, "Do you want to see my identification, Mr. Shayne?"

"Not necessary, Mitchell," the redhead graveled.

At the funeral, Mr. Medium had stood slightly apart from the other mourners.

Mitchell had a false relaxed air as he sat with his forearms braced against the bar and his cupped fingers slowly turned the beer glass in idle circles.

"You have talked to Miss Oxford," he said, staring at the beer.

Shayne drank half the cognac, followed with a sip of the ice water, said nothing. Mitch-

ell had made a flat statement. So the FBI was watching Nancy Oxford. Or him. Or both. Why?

"And you've expressed an interest in the death of Texford Long to the local police," Mitchell continued.

Shayne took another drink of ice water.

"Why?" Mitchell asked bluntly.

The redhead finished the cognac.

Mitchell twirled the glass of beer. Finally he said, "Okay. Play silent. First, I must ask you to drop that interest, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne waved a hand to the bartender, ordered a refill. The bartender poured, faded.

"All right," said Mitchell, "I'm telling you to drop the interest!"

Shayne drank.

"Antonio Cicerone," said Mitchell, "is a known mobster boss. Consorting, Mr. Shayne—it can get you a sentence. At the very least, it can get you a very large amount of irritating, time-consuming detainment for questioning. On the other hand, we understand that you're a businessman, and any businessman is interested in personal profit. Therefore, we are prepared to pay your customary fee for your involvement and inconvenience to

date, however, we will expect that you return to your more routine affairs. Do we have a deal?"

"Mitchell," Shayne said slowly, softly, without looking at the FBI agent, "when you tell me why the death of a newsstand operator in Miami, Florida, draws the interest of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Washington, D.C., I will have fulfilled my commitment and, in all likelihood, I will return to routine matters."

"Matters of the Bureau are not your concern, Mr. Shayne," Mitchell said flatly. "Nor to be passed on to any other outside party—which, according to our information, in this case is Antonio Cicerone."

Shayne drank more cognac. He had a piece of information Antonio Cicerone would pay a fortune to have. Cicerone had a leak inside his organization via a cleverly planted Federal agent or a stoolie.

But that was Cicerone's problem, not Shayne's.

Mitchell left the stool. "I assume you've got the picture?"

The detective grunted. Mitchell walked out of the bar. He left his glass of beer untouched.

Shayne's thoughts whirled. Mitchell obviously had trailed him to the bar from some point in his day's travel. The FBI

man knew about the visit to Nancy Oxford, the meeting with Cicerone. Then there had been the conversation with Arnie Fowler, the futile attempt to roust Buckwald.

"Okay, where had Mitchell picked up the redhead?"

Federal pressure had popped alive immediately in this case almost in the same instant Tex Long died. Therefore, it was safe to assume that Mitchell was not allowing dust to gather. Using the same premise, was it not also safe to assume the FBI man would lean on a private detective the moment he realized the detective was not pulling in horns under police cutoff?

That would have been when the detective had attended a funeral—or had brought Callie Bush home and then had a meeting with the mobster Cicerone. Unless . . .

Shayne used the thumb and forefinger of his right hand to tug his left earlobe as he sought logic. Logic told him Mitchell had not been physically present at the meeting with Cicerone, the visit to Nancy Oxford. Mitchell would have surfaced sooner if he had.

Okay, so other agents had been present. And they had reported to Mitchell. Reported where?

Mitchell was not an office

man. Mitchell roamed the shadows, remained out of sight more often than in sight. So where had he been treading today? In the shadows of the newsstand? In the shadows of the building where a man named Buckwald had an apartment?

Had he been watching Buckwald's apartment? Had he trailed a detective from the apartment to the bar? If he had—what made Buckwald so important?

Shayne returned to the apartment, but he did not get an answer to his heavy-handed knock. He went out of the building, stood in the drizzle, lighted a cigaret as he surveyed the street. Mitchell did not surface.

The redhead went to his Buick, backed it down the block, parked at the curb and settled in. He'd wait for Buckwald's return if it took all night.

It took three hours and ten minutes, plus a package of cigarettes.

IX

THE CAB ROLLED past Mike Shayne and dipped into the curbing up ahead. A figure in a wheelchair rolled out of the apartment building, deftly hoisted himself inside and lifted

the folded wheelchair in behind him. The cab rolled. The Buick motor purred and windshield wipers swept the glass clean. Shayne trailed the bright red taillights of the taxi through the wet dusk, keeping one eye on his rear view mirror. Was Mitchell back there somewhere? He watched for other headlights to come alive. None did.

The detective slammed a palm flat against the steering wheel. Buckwald had been inside his apartment all this time! Why had he not answered a demanding knock on his front door?

The cab took Shayne into a popular shopping area where there was a mixture of shops and office buildings. It rolled down a ramp into the vast concrete parking area of a tall building. Shayne pulled into a parking stall as the taxi braked in front of a set of elevators. Buckwald left the cab, rolled the wheelchair into one of the elevators and disappeared.

Shayne muttered an oath, then trailed the cab out of the building. Buckwald had dumped him. He could easily disappear behind any door on any floor of the building before the detective could get upstairs.

Shayne nudged the cab into the curb at the second intersection. The driver was angry. He

started to leave the taxi, but the redhead leaned on the door and put pressure on the man's extended leg.

"Your last fare," snapped Shayne. "He was going where?"

"The Gulfstream Building, fella," growled the driver. "And lay off my leg, huh?"

Shayne put a little more weight on the cab door. "He say *where* in the Gulfstream Building?"

"Hey, man, *ease off!* I pick up a guy, I deliver him, that's *all!*"

Shayne eased. "Yeah," he grunted. Then he dug a \$10 bill from his wallet and shoved it in the driver's shirt pocket. "For your leg, pal."

He whirled to the Buick and the cab driver said, "Hey—you wasn't fooling nobody! The fare spotted you the instant you flipped on your headlights back there at his place!"

"He did or you did?" snapped Shayne.

"*He* did, man! He was watching!"

Shayne returned to his starting point. But the building superintendent stopped him in the hallway.

"Hey, *Red!*"

Shayne whirled.

The man waved a half-empty bottle of cheap wine. "You know Buckwald ain't here. I seen that fancy Buick outside earlier. I seen you follow



Buckwald when he left, so you know he ain't here. Whatcha want?"

"Inside," Shayne said flatly.

"Buckwald's place? You gotta be kidding! That's private!"

Shayne got out his wallet again.

But the building superintendent shook his head doggedly. "Don't even offer, man. You been here twice in one day. Big deal. I never seen you before, I'll never see you again. Buckwald, I see every day for almost two years now. I'll see

him tomorrow. And he pays rent—on time. Get lost."

A tall lean youth entered the building from the street door behind the superintendent. He stopped short when he saw Shayne. He looked as if he wanted to bolt. Then he skittered up the stairwell and disappeared.

"Cat Man lives here?" growled Shayne.

"Cat Man?" the building superintendent shuddered, then shook his head and drank from the bottle of wine. "Name's John Tuley, Red—and he ain't silent like a cat, he ain't quick like a cat, and he don't meow. But, okay—you wanna call him Cat Man, he's Cat Man . . . and, yeah, he's got a place upstairs. How come you wanna know?"

John Tuley lived several seconds with a locked front door rattling on its hinges before he finally opened up to Shayne. Then he cowered in a wide-eyed half-crouch and eased back into the litter of his place as the hulking redhead stepped inside.

Shayne spotted the sparkling new portable radio on the floor beside the rumpled bed immediately. "John," he said, "got a new radio, huh?"

Cat Man flinched.

Shayne knew now what was missing in Tex Long's ransacked apartment. Tex had lived by radio.

"Man hangs around on the street," speculated Shayne, "he hears things, sees things. Like cop cars at Tex Long's newsstand. And the word drifts fast. Somebody has hit Tex. He's dead. So maybe if a guy would drift over to Tex' place, shinny up a drainpipe . . ."

Shayne let the words hang for a few seconds before he snarled. "You want to take it from there, Cat Man?"

"You can have the radio!" bleated the youth.

Shayne delivered John Tuley and the radio to a precinct station. No one there quite understood what the redhead was talking about, but when he threw the name Will Gentry into the conversation, the cops suddenly became very efficient and investigation-prone.

Shayne went to his apartment. He sailed his hat across the living room to the couch as he stomped into the kitchen to build a fast cold meat and cheese sandwich and pour a cognac. He took both to the bedroom, where he stripped and walked into the bath. Hot shower water helped ease his tension. Locked muscles and taut nerves expanded gradually and finally he picked out a sense of direction.

He'd corral Buckwald in the morning, find out why the man was so sensitive to having

someone on his tail. Most cab riders are not. But morning for the redhead came while darkness was still a shroud. The insistent buzz of the front doorbell brought him out of slumber. He rolled up on the edge of the bed with a scowl and flipped on lamplight.

A glance at the bedside clock told him it was ten minutes before three o'clock. The buzzer continued to grate. Someone was leaning heavily with a thumb.

His scowl deepened as he padded into the dark front room. He found another lamp, stomped to the door, then froze with his fingers inches from the knob.

A sixth sense was working. Hackles on the back of his neck rose. There was big trouble on the other side of the door.

He stepped far to his left and pressed against the wall, reached out, stretching to touch the knob. He flipped it, then yanked back his hand.

The shotgun blast shattered the door.

X

POLICE DETECTIVES pulled from gin rummy games at three-thirty in the morning to investigate an attempted assassination, were serious and professional—until they discov-

ered that the intended victim was a private eye. Then they became jocular. Some conversation turned to light banter.

Shayne had not called the cops. A neighbor had. He finally bellowed, "You got it, boys! An unknown attempted hit. *Fade!*"

Startled detectives stood like statues for a moment, then shuffled toward the blasted opening. Relief was on their faces.

Gin rummy was not nearly as trying to figure out as an attempted assassination. But their leader remained a professional.

"I'll leave a report for Chief Gentry, Shayne," he said. "He'll see it first thing in the morning."

Shayne ushered him to the hallway, then waved neighbors back to their beds. The night building superintendent said, "We will get a new door immediately, Mr. Shayne."

"Not before eight in the morning, I trust," said the redhead. "I need some sleep."

He sprawled in the dark on the couch, smoking one cigaret after another as he stared at the shattered entry, wondering who had attempted to blast him? And why?

Deep inside him lay a minute but gut-clenching glob of speculation. An FBI agent had

warned. An FBI agent had been ignored. Was it possible that a representative of a United States Government agency had ordered the assassination of an obstinate private eye? Shayne snorted against the thought. But it lurked.

He finally dozed, awoke to a couple of carpenters standing in his front room, bracing a new front door between them. "We're supposed to put this on," said one.

Shayne left the couch to put coffee on, shaved and dressed. Strapping on his shoulder rig, he returned to the kitchen and poured the black brew.

One of the carpenters stared at him. "That's the biggest damn handgun I ever seen," he said in awe. Then he added, "Hey, didja hear about the big bombing?"

Shayne cocked a shaggy brow as he sipped the hot coffee, said, "What got bombed?"

"Bank across town," said the carpenter. "About three—four o'clock—this morning. The radio is saying the bombers got between forty and fifty thou."

Shayne's phone jangled. He scowled. But it could be Lucy Hamilton calling from his office. Or it might be Gentry who wanted to know about a shotgun blast.

The soft voice in Shayne's ear said, "Antonio Cicerone,

Shayne. One of our banks was bombed last night."

Shayne grunted. "Just heard about it."

Cicerone hesitated, then said carefully, "You have company?"

"Couple of guys hanging a new door. Mine got blasted off its hinges around three this morning. They're leaving now. Hold it a minute."

Shayne put the phone against his chest, waved goodbye to the carpenters. Alone, he jammed the phone between shoulder and ear as he lighted a fresh cigaret. "Okay."

Cicerone was curious. "Door—blasted?"

"Some goon got me out of bed, used a shotgun on my door. But he missed me. No holes in my skin."

"Did you get him?"

"I didn't even see him. By the time I got all the noise out of my ears and my feet working, he was gone."

Cicerone was silent for a moment before musing aloud, "And this was around three this morning?"

"What is it, Antonio?" the detective said, alert.

"The bank got hit around three," the mobster said. "Could there be a tie?"

Shayne's brows came down. "You're out in front of me, friend," he said.

Again Cicerone lapsed into

silence. Then he said, "Shayne, a Federal man came around to see me this morning. It's okay. I understand. A bank is bombed, I am the president of the bank's board of directors, and Federals get involved when banks are bombed. But I've seen this federal before today. He was at the funeral of Tex Long. I saw him drive away while I was waiting for you."

"Mitchell," breathed Shayne.

"That's his name," said Cicerone. "You know him?"

"I've listened to him," Shayne said.

Cicerone picked it up. "Long, a bank bombing, where's a tie-in that? There isn't—except the same Federal man is on the scene. Sure, everybody's economy-minded these days, everybody's cutting back. But tell me the Feds are going to sic the same agent on the murder of an informer and the bombing of a bank—on the surface, a couple of totally unrelated happenings. Tell me that, Shayne. It's why I called."

"I haven't got anything to tell you, Antonio," Shayne said truthfully as he paced and smoked rapidly. His thoughts were whirling. Mentally, he had a score or more flying objects zipping around in his head. If he could capture the objects and place them . . . But his reach remained too short.

"Wrong, Shayne," Cicerone said.

"You told me something. You told me somebody tried a hit on you—around three this morning. That's about the time the bank was bombed."

Shayne became grim. "You want to tie Long, a bank bombing and a shotgun blast at my front door?"

"Why not? Has Mitchell been around to see you yet today? If he hasn't, I'll wager the entire Gold Coast against your cufflinks, he will within the hour!"

Shayne stopped pacing. His eyes had fallen on the rolled morning newspaper one of the carpenters had tossed into the front room. He stared hard at the newspaper. Thoughts began to click. He gripped the phone hard, said, "Got to roll, Antonio. I'll be in touch."

"Shayne. . . !" It was almost a bleat.

The detective slapped the phone down. He slid into his coat and rode the self-service elevator down to the basement garage. Thirty-five minutes later, he was banging a fist on Buckwald's front door. He did not get an answer.

He rousted the building manager. But the gnarled man balked. "God, you *again!* My renters have got rights, you know! I can't open up for any-

body who comes along. Besides, you ain't a cop. You're—"

"Maybe Buckwald fell out of his wheelchair," snapped Shayne. "Maybe he whacked his skull or something. How do you know unless we look? It's only nine-thirty in the morning. Seems he'd be at home at this hour."

The building superintendent wavered, finally bent. He got a huge ring of keys and plodded back to Buckwald's door.

Buckwald was not at home. And the building superintendent was immediately insistent. "Hey, you gotta get out of here! You got no right to—"

"Un-huh," growled Shayne.

He was prowling. He knew he only had a few minutes. He had the superintendent temporarily befuddled, but that wasn't going to last. When the guy came to his senses, a certain detective would have to bend fast.

Buckwald may have been one hell of a neat dresser, but he was a sloppy housekeeper. A small typewriter off in one corner was surrounded by wadded paper, newspaper sections were strewn about, there were beer cans in every room and a bed that might not have been made in a month.

Shayne examined the bedroom closet. It was a different world. Sparkling new and up to

date clothing filled the closet. On the floor several pairs of new shoes were lined up like soldiers in formation.

Shayne frowned over the line. To his right were four pairs of shoes that could have come out of a store yesterday. To his left, three pairs with slightly worn heels.

The building superintendent came to his senses. "*Shayne!*" he howled, "you get the hell out of here! You don't belong in here!"

Outside, Shayne marched through the mist to the Buick. He shot side glances around to see if he could pick up the FBI man, Mitchell. Nothing.

He dropped into the Buick, lit a cigaret. Buckwald, Tex and a folded newspaper under a counter in Tex Long's newsstand. Was there a tie?

Shayne thumped the steering wheel as he smoked. Buckwald lived in the neighborhood, Buckwald had known Tex, Buckwald was a frequent visitor to the newsstand, Buckwald had attended the funeral.

Buckwald was also a furtive bastard. Elusive. He never seemed to be at home. Or, if he was, he didn't answer demanding knocks on his door. Too, he was sensitive to tails. And he knew how to shake one.

Add—Buckwald, aware of it

or not, had the FBI on his back. Why?

Was Buckwald a guerrilla—a Ross Deidler type?

Shayne pulled himself erect behind the steering wheel, shot a cigaret butt out to the street.

He knew something else about Mr. Buckwald, too. The guy could walk.

Shayne flipped the ignition key, and a large man slid silently onto the seat beside him from the sidewalk. The man's quick hand pinned Shayne's inside his coat as he attempted to whip out the .45.

Shayne heard the back door of the Buick open. Another weight dropped on a seat immediately behind him. "Drive," said a gruff voice from the back seat.

XI

SHAYNE PILOTED the Buick as if he had a pre-conceived notion of where he was being taken. His head was thrust forward, his craggy face set.

He was driving by reflexes. Inside his skull, thoughts churned. Who were these dudes? Why had they landed on him? What did they want?

"My name is Taylor," the man on the seat beside the redhead said coldly. "Behind you is Pena. If you will consider following my instructions to the

nut, it will make everything easier. Turn right at the next intersection. We want to go north out of the city."

They went far north and then west. Shayne followed instructions and the macadam road around the shoreline of a lake to a long house trailer that sat alone in a secluded area. He was ushered inside the trailer and pointed to a narrow pulldown couch.

"You a fisherman, Shayne?" asked Taylor. "I hope so. Otherwise, the next four to five days are going to be boring as hell."

Taylor was at a tiny cold box. He got out three cans of beer, tossed one of them to Shayne. Then, suddenly, he turned on what was supposed to be a grin. "Relax, Shayne. Enjoy your vacation." He tossed the other can of beer to the squat man named Pena.

Taylor was long and lean. He was at the far end of the trailer now, facing the redhead, slouched slightly as he stood with hips braced against a short counter. Pena was to Shayne's right, much closer as he sat on the front edge of an overstuffed chair. He had opened the can of beer, had the can lifted against his mouth.

Taylor glanced down as he hooked the ring of the beer's pop top.

Shayne pitched the can of beer in his hand with all his strength. It struck Taylor in the chest, brought a startled shout from him as he went up on his toes, his face suddenly screwed up in pain.

Shayne went headlong into the seated Pena, slashing a wrist against the man's exposed Adam's apple. Pena gagged and lurched from the chair. Shayne slid in behind it, hooked a forearm across Pena's throat and yanked. With his left hand, he searched Pena's body until he found the gun in a hi-belt rig. He yanked it out and aimed it straight at the moving Taylor.

Taylor froze halfway across the trailer, in midstride, his jaw set, eyes hard. He was breathing harshly.

"You're making a mistake, Shayne," he said.

Shayne fired a shot into the trailer floor at Taylor's feet. "And you'll be making another one, pal, if you don't get over here and use your necktie on your friend's wrists!"

Taylor moved cautiously. He stripped off his tie slowly, moved in behind Pena. Shayne stood back, watched Taylor knot Pena's wrists. Then the redhead used the gun to wave Taylor to a wall of the trailer.

"Spread it all out," he growled.

Taylor faced the wall, slapped his palms wide apart against it, brought his feet back and spread them. He seemed to be an expert at that sort of thing.

Shayne moved in behind him, suddenly kicked Taylor's feet from under him. Taylor went down hard with another yell. Shayne was on him instantly. He yanked a drape from a window, used the cord to truss Taylor's wrists. Then he flipped the man over and found a wallet. He grunted when he saw the identification.

Taylor and Pena were agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Shayne found his .45 in Taylor's pocket, slapped it into its shoulder rig, put Pena's gun on a tiny table and then sat on the front edge of the small couch. "Who wants to spill?" he asked flatly.

Taylor still was breathing hard. He shot a glance toward his partner. Pena was struggling against the knotted wrists. Shayne reached out with one foot and kicked the bottom of Pena's shoe. "That's a no-no," he warned.

Taylor said, "Shayne, wasn't a door exploding in your face enough warning? You're poking into something too big even for you."

"Yeah?" snapped the detective. "Tell me about it."



Taylor shot Pena a glance. Pena shrugged slightly. "Mitchell said to level if it became necessary. I figure this nut has made it necessary," Pena grumbled.

Taylor looked Shayne straight in the eye. "You've been nosing around Buckwald. You have a reason. The Long hit, I'd guess. You've got an idea Buckwald might've had something to do with that. He probably did, Shayne. But he's

bigger meat to us. We want him moving around on the streets."

Taylor paused. Shayne waited in silence, his eyes glued to the FBI man. Taylor finally continued, "Mitchell asked you to pull in your horns. You didn't. So we picked you up this morning and came here."

Taylor hesitated again. "You could help us a helluva bunch, Shayne, if you'd be content to fish for a few days. All of this should be finished, and I'll practically guarantee you we can hand you Long's killer."

"Keep talking, pal," growled the redhead. "You're beginning to fit some pieces."

Taylor chewed his lower lip, sighed again, then went on. "You saw the newspaper at Long's place. We know you saw it, because you mentioned it to the cop Joe Brock. Deidler's Revolutionary Command—urban guerrillas, Shayne. And they're gathering in Miami—have gathered—we figure, after last night's bank bombing. That's their kind of action.

"They picked up some cash. They've got something else cooking. These people aren't your run-of-the-mill Bonnie and Clydes. They don't move around the country knocking off banks simply to get rich. But they need financing for whatever action they do have planned."

"Like for instance?" said Shayne.

Taylor frowned. "That's the kicker. We don't know what they've got in mind. We've got three of their people in prison in California. It could be they're going after their freedom. Or it might be Deidler. Deidler hasn't surfaced for almost two years now.

"His guerrillas have. They made a raid on utilities in the state of Washington about a year ago, bombed some oil rigs in Texas since, but Deidler didn't surface later to make public claims for either action. And that's not normal. Deidler's pattern has been to let the world know his army still functions.

"So it makes us suspicious. For instance, could Deidler be in jail or prison somewhere, and we don't even know we have him? If he is, maybe these people here are going after him instead of the three in California."

Shayne ran a thumbnail along his jawline. "Taylor, I've got the impression you boys are flying by the seat of your pants. What the hell makes you figure Deidler's crowd is in town? How come you're laying a bank job on his people? Just because it was a bombing? Man, there are other dudes around who know how to blow open a bank!"

"Un-huh," Taylor nodded. "But we've been piecing information together for months, Shayne. Little drops here and there around the country—and a lot of it points to Miami. Some of Deidler's people have been showing a helluva interest in this city."

"Then you've got some members of this so-called army spotted."

"We know some of them on sight, sure. They surface here and there. And before you ask—yes, we could bust them. But only on suspicion. We want them cold when we get them, Shayne—like the three in California. They were wounded during a shootout with guards when Deidler's bunch hit an armory, going after automatic weapons.

"But our primary target remains Deidler. We get him, and we figure we're going to put a big damper on the army. Like what happened to the SLA after *their* shootout."

"Buckwald?" snapped Shayne.

"One of Deidler's people. He once was a Deidler student at Columbia."

"Figures." The detective nodded. "I wanted to hear *you* say it. He walks, you know. That wheelchair bit is a lot of jazz. I spotted new shoes at his place, some of them with worn heels, and it doesn't figure that a guy

riding a wheelchair is going to wear down heels."

"Yes," nodded Taylor, "we know he's mobile. So do the airline people—and the insurance people. Buckwald was a passenger on a commercial flight that went down. The crash was legit, and he had some trouble with his legs after the crash. Airlines and insurance paid, then discovered they were being conned—the guy wasn't totally disabled as he claimed. But they refrained from taking action after we talked to them. That was a long time ago, Shayne."

The detective eyed Taylor coldly. "Big companies cooperate, but a single private eye doesn't, huh?"

Taylor said flatly, "It fits."

"Taylor," Shayne stood, lighted a cigaret, began to pace the small confines of the trailer. He smoked rapidly as he walked. He was reconstructing, putting together what he had.

"Buckwald has been on Long's street for a long time," said the redhead. "He frequented the newsstand, was recognized by others in the neighborhood. Okay, he's accepted. Then—bingo!—Tex gets knocked off. Not only does he get hit, but his eyes are dug out of their sockets. That has to mean something."

"To me, it means he saw something, revealed it too quickly or to the wrong person. A guy comes in, sticks a knife in him, then digs out his eyes. Just a little 'I'll show you, you bastard,' wouldn't you say?"

Shayne glanced down at Taylor. The FBI man nodded. "Something like that, probably."

"Okay, the newspaper under the counter, the pencil scratching, probably by Tex. He puts a beard on a man named Deidler. Does that mean he has spotted some guy who might be Deidler?"

"Could be," agreed Taylor.

"But where's the Buckwald tie?"

"That, Shayne," Taylor admitted slowly, "remains a weak point."

Shayne stopped pacing, stared hard at the FBI man. "Tell me that, up until last Friday night, you boys had Buckwald under surveillance, but only *periodic* surveillance."

Taylor scowled, remained silent for a few seconds, then said, "I'm afraid that's the case. Until last Friday night, until Long was killed and that newspaper with the penciled artist work was found, we were doing periodic checks on Buckwald."

"A suspected member of the Deidler crowd."

"There's no way we can keep

a twenty-four-hour surveillance on every known or suspected guerrilla or radical in this nation. We've been watching Buckwald for a long time, but it was only spot checks until last Friday night. When we learned there was a killing in Buckwald's neighborhood, when we checked the police file and saw the bit about the Deidler article, we got hot on Buckwald. We've been on him every minute since."

Shayne cocked a brow. "Every minute? He didn't ditch you boys in a shopping-center complex?"

Taylor bit his lips. "All right, that little move caught us short, too. Like it did you."

"That's better," Shayne grunted, resuming his pacing. "And there was a bombing."

Taylor nodded. "Plus an attempted assassination."

Shayne gave the FBI man a sharp look.

"Buckwald spotted you, Shayne. You know that. You stopped the cab driver. We did, too. Figure it for yourself. Deidler's crowd is in town. They're moving. You could become a hindrance, so they say, waste the man. Killing is how they function. They use man's natural fear of death as a tool."

Shayne waved a hand. "Let's get back to Friday night. You're figuring it was someone

from Deidler's crowd who hit Tex?"

"That's the way we see it," said Taylor.

"And if one of Deidler's people was in the newsstand area, he was with Buckwald."

"He was at Buckwald's place. He may have gone to the newsstand alone or Buckwald may have been physically with him."

"Tex sees the guy," said Shayne. "He remembers a newspaper article, one with pictures. He digs out the paper, starts using a pencil—"

"Something like that, yes," said Taylor. "He might have been crazy enough to follow the guy when he left the newsstand."

"Could be." Shayne agreed. "Tex trails, is spotted, the guy returns, kills. With or without Buckwald watching. Is Deidler the kind to dig the eyes out of a man's head?"

Taylor's frown was deep. "No," he said after a few seconds. "That's not the composite we have of him."

"Buckwald?"

Taylor shook his head.

"Then?"

"Some of the others, yes."

"So if Tex saw anyone, maybe it wasn't Deidler. Maybe it was one of the others. Maybe the doodling of a beard on Deidler was idle sketching."

Taylor's frown remained.
"Possible."

Shayne made a snap decision.
"Okay, see you gents."

"Hey, wait a *minute!*" Taylor cried.

"Pal," said the detective from the door of the trailer house, "Buckwald is the cog, right?"

Taylor turned to stone.

"You've been sitting on your tails, nursing him along, hoping to get to Deidler and his crowd. How about dangling him? I figure I might hang him from a flagpole somewhere and see who comes around to cut him down. Hell, it might even be Deidler!"

"*Shayne!*" yelled Taylor. "Cut us loose!"

The redhead grunted. "Don't tell me a couple boys from the Federal Bureau of Investigation can't figure out how to get out of a drape cord and a necktie."

XII

SHAYNE MULLED it over as he pointed the powerful Buick back toward the city. Thick lightning-streaked clouds were spilling rain steadily and the redhead was forced to pay attention to his driving. But, in his mind's eye, he was contemplating the man named Buckwald.

Buckwald was shark-bait. Dangle him and watch for fins.

If no fins showed, Buckwald would be someone for the cops to chew on in the Long muder case. Or if the cops weren't interested, there was Antonio Cicerone, who frowned on having his banks blown up.

A private eye wouldn't be making any new friends at the FBI by reversing their modus operandi, but . . .

Reverse!

Shayne's fingers tightened on the steering wheel. Back in the city, he drove to the *Daily News* building and purchased a copy of the Sunday paper that contained the Ross Deidler piece. Then he asked for the art department, where he talked to a man who frowned for a moment over the detective's request, then took the folded newspaper to a large sketch pad.

The artist worked swiftly from the pictures in the newspaper, following Shayne's instructions. He ignored the girl and reversed the hairy appearances of the four men. The artist put a beard on Deidler and removed the beards from the other three men.

Buckwald became a man named Martin Waldheim in the newspaper story.

Shayne scowled. FBI people weren't stupid—and the FBI had artists. But perhaps they didn't need talented fingers. Perhaps they already knew

that "Buckwald" was Waldheim, that "Buckwald" existed only in Miami. After all, a name was only a label.

Tex Long, on the other hand—doodling a beard on Deidler while mentally removing beards from the other three—might have figured he had made a helluva discovery.

Buckwald opened his door to Shayne's first rap. He sat in the wheelchair, blocking entry into the apartment, and stared up at the redhead. He was immaculate in a yellow casual suit and an open-neck brown shirt. Brown shoes sparkled at the detective.

Then Buckwald rolled back into the room. "Come in," he said.

The detective stepped forward, his hand going to the .45 inside his coat. He stopped when a soft voice on his right said, "Freeze!"

He was looking into the snout of an automatic rifle.

Holding it was a dark-haired girl who looked in her late twenties. She wore a pale blue navy shirt, faded jeans and scratched leather thongs. Her face was unpainted, her eyes dark and hostile. She handled the rifle as if it were an extension of herself.

"Well," she breathed, "he came to us, Martin."

"Didn't he?" said Buckwald.

He left the chair, came to Shayne, took the .45 from its rig. "Heavy, man," he breathed, hefting the weapon. "Bit tool." He moved back out of Shayne's reach, then frowned. "What did you do with the FBI?"

"You don't miss much, do you, pal?" said Shayne with a half-smile.

Buckwald smiled. "We try not to."

"Where do you have Mitchell?"

Buckwald lifted an eyebrow. "Oh, you *are* an intelligent one. I like that."

"You *know* I was here earlier today," Shayne snapped. "You *know* I was taken away. You *know* they are FBI. So you know about Mitchell, too. And you're suddenly coming out into the open—which means you Deidler people are about to make your move. Where's Mitchell?"

Buckwald's smile went wide. "Show him, Margot."

The girl stepped out of the bedroom doorway. Mitchell lay on the bed. He was spread-eagled, wrists and ankles trussed to the bedposts. There was a large slab of adhesive tape across his mouth, but his eyes were wide open as he strained to keep his head up.

"Margot wants to waste him," Buckwald said. He laughed softly. "Margot likes to kill."

Killing is a very satisfying experience for her."

"How are you with a knife, Margot?" Shayne asked.

She brought the rifle snout down, squeezed the butt against her hip. The dark eyes were narrow.

"No!" snapped Buckwald. "We'll take Shayne with us to the hotel. A lot of cops in this town know him. We can use him as a hostage for a few hours."

The girl looked torn with indecision. The dark eyes flicked to Buckwald, returned to Shayne. Shayne held his breath while she decided. Then he attempted to ignore her. He kept his eyes on Buckwald. "Why Tex?"

"An unfortunate happening." Buckwald shrugged. "There was a piece in the newspaper, and Tex came around. He asked for a buck. Stupid! It's called blackmail, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne said nothing.

Buckwald used the muzzle of the .45 to scratch the tip of his nose. "And the asking came at a most inopportune time—that is, from Tex's point of view. Margot and some of the others had just blown into town."

"And Margot likes to kill," said Shayne.

"Shayne!" snarled the girl. "It's the almighty dollar that kills!"



He risked a glance at her. "On the other hand, honey, you people bombed a bank to get fifty thousand of them."

Her lips thinned. "Not us," said Buckwald. "The bank job wasn't our work. We want ten million. Fifty thousand wouldn't even begin to—"

"Ten Million!"

Buckwald looked amused. "Seems astronomical?" Then he nodded. "Yes, I suppose it does. But it is not such an out-of-sight figure when you consider the training and equipping of an army in South America. The South is about to rise again, Mr. Shayne." He chuckled.

Shayne said, "So that's where Ross Deidler is, in South America."

"No," said Buckwald, "Ross died two years ago in a cave in western Colorado. It was a very simple thing. He suffered a fatal heart attack one day. We buried him in the cave."

"And you? New leader?" said Shayne.

"Someone has to command," said Buckwald. "When a leader falls, a lieutenant rises."

"Selected by whom?"

"In this case, a very simple selection—since the only other two lieutenants, and one private, are in a California prison, the result of a very ill-conceived operation."

"Plotted by one of the other lieutenants, no doubt."

"He's still sitting out there, reflecting, I think."

"You sound smug, Buckwald."

"I have reason to be, Mr. Shayne. Since you were wary enough to stand out of the path of a shotgun blast, but stupid enough to return here, you are now going to play a rôle in the happening that gives birth to this feeling."

He glanced down at a gold wristwatch, looked at the girl. "It's time to roll, Margot."

"The pig?" she hissed.

Buckwald used the .45 to direct Shayne out of the apartment. In the doorway, he said over his shoulder. "I'll bring the car around."

He took Shayne through a back door of the building into a small lot. There stood a long grey sedan with rain spattering off its waxed finish. Buckwald handed the keys to the detective.

"You drive," he said. "Pull around in front and pick up Margot."

She wore a cheap black slicker when she came out of the building. The position of her arm and the slight stiffness of her walk told Shayne the automatic rifle was braced against her side, out of sight.

She maneuvered into the front seat beside the detective. The muzzle of the rifle appeared through the split front of the slicker. Her face was set—she did not look right or left.

From the back seat, Buckwald said, "You okay?"

"I feel beautiful, doll," said the girl.

Shayne's blood churned. He knew that Mitchell was dead.

XIII

"THE PALM DOOR, Shayne," said Buckwald. "I assume you know where it is."

The Palm Door was a Miami landmark, a tall hotel steeped in tradition and reverence—by those who could afford to revere on that high a plateau. Only

the very wealthy resided or temporarily lodged at the Palm Door.

"Before tonight is finished," said Buckwald, "we will have ten million dollars and private transportation aboard an airliner to Algeria or the Palm Door will be an inferno. Our soldiers are already inside and have already set the fire bombs."

"A hotel can't cough up ten million, Buckwald," said Shayne. "A few thousand, maybe, but—"

"But the prospect," Shayne," Buckwald interrupted. "You're not sighting in on the *whole* prospect. The hotel has to be good for a portion—right? And then there are the tenants, permanent and overnight. No one wants to die—so the tenants unload.

"Still nowhere near ten mill, granted. So the city chips in. What mayor wants one of his top hotels burned off the face of the earth—Especially with people inside?

"And then there's Dade County—the state—and you know what? There's Uncle Sam, the Federal Government, with all that money available.

"Can you imagine the publicity this is going to get? An hour from now it's going to be on all of the national TV networks. What network is going to take

a chance on missing the firing of a fancy hotel in Miami? We will be on prime time. And that, in turn, is going to get the nation glued to the tube. Opinions will vary, but opinions will flow—and so will the cash. Shayne, before the night is out we will have our ten million and an airliner. Got the picture?"

Shayne had it.

He also figured he was going to live long enough to get the grey sedan and its passengers to the Palm Door. At the moment, he was insurance, no more. If they had a flat tire, if they were stopped by a traffic cop, if they had an accident, he could change the tire or he could be a hostage.

Upon arrival at the Palm Door, however, he no longer had a function. He was dead.

Rain suddenly splattered hard against the car. Shayne slowed, concentrated on driving. The wipers were unable to clear the streaming windshield. Other cars were pulling into the curb as the street began to fill.

"Keep going!" Buckwald ordered.

Shayne inched along. Headlights became bright behind him, hung as the rain seemed to fall faster still. Shayne knew he had a tailgater, somebody who was using him for a guide.

The driver back there would keep moving as long as he did.

It occurred to him that maybe he could use the tailgater. Maybe he could suddenly jam brakes, let the tailgater plough into the rear of the grey sedan.

"Bastard!" cried Margot. "Get off us!"

She turned in the seat, brought the automatic rifle up and down on the back of the front seat.

"No!" cried Buckwald.

His cry was lost in the thunderous chatter of the rifle as Margot sent the headlights dancing back and then veering off and up on the sidewalk.

Shayne turned the nose of the sedan into a braked car at the curb, yanked open the door and bailed out. He landed on his chest and water splashed around him. He sprung. The rear of the sedan with its red taillights loomed over him. He wriggled in under the car, using his elbows to propel himself forward. He keyed himself to go in any direction should Margot slide under the steering wheel and back off the parked car.

The girl debarked. Her wide-spread ankles were to Shayne's left. He reached out and flailed a forearm across them. She yelped, and then she was down and he heard the clatter of the dropped rifle.

He snaked out and pounced on her back. He hooked one arm under her chin and grabbed a thigh with his free hand. Rolling up on his side, he used her for a shield.

Buckwald was bolting. Shayne caught a fleeting glimpse of him racing down the sidewalk. The leader was sacrificing a soldier. He was heading for his main unit in the hotel.

Shayne rolled the struggling girl from him and splashed after Buckwald. He caught him with a racing drive. They skidded through water to the corner of a sewer opening. Buckwald writhed. Shayne jammed one hand against the back of his head and pushed his face into the roiling water, held him while he found the .45 with the other hand.

Rifle slugs splatting into the street near his shoulder sent Shayne into a spin. He rolled behind a parked car, then went up on the sidewalk and used the braked vehicles as shields as he moved from one to another back toward Margot.

He saw her running through the heavy rain toward the intersection and a red stoplight. A convertible was braked for the light. Margot yanked open the door. A moment later, a man spilled out from under the steering wheel and a screaming

girl dived to the sidewalk on Shayne's side. Margot disappeared inside the convertible.

Shayne sprinted and leapt up onto the trunk of the convertible in a flat-chested drive. Reaching for the edges of the canvass roof, he heaved himself on top of the car as the convertible shot across the intersection. He figured he was over the girl, but he didn't want to kill her. He put the muzzle of the .45 forward and fired.

He heard her scream and then the convertible weaved crazily. He pitched himself from the top and landed on water and concrete. Pain shot through his body and there was a sudden white light inside his skull.

He shook himself. The white light went out. He looked around. The convertible was up on the sidewalk, its front end smashed against a building wall. He got up and staggered to it. The girl still sat behind the steering wheel. She was slumped over it and was moaning as she clenched a thigh.

Shayne pushed her over into the passenger seat. The bullet wound in her leg was bleeding profusely, but she wasn't going to die in the next few seconds.

The car's motor was still operating. He raced it. There were some odd clanking noises, but when he yanked the automatic gear stick into reverse,

the car moved back from the building. He whipped around in a U-turn and returned to the grey sedan.

Buckwald was on his feet, staggering around in the rain. He was hunched over and coughing water.

Shayne pulled up beside him and opened a door. Buckwald stiffened. The redhead caught him by the shirt-front. He yanked Buckwald into the convertible, stuffed him on the seat beside the moaning Margot.

Then Mike Shayne drove to Downtown Police Headquarters, where he raised all kinds of hell until he got Will Gentry prodded from his expensive and comfortable home in Bal Harbour and a bomb squad detached to the Palm Door.

XIV

IT WAS FINISHED. The wild Miami night had quieted. The threats and violence of the powerful rainstorm had moved on and city residents now sat relaxed in relief, licking only tiny wounds left by the minor flooding.

The bomb boys sat back, too, smoking taste-good cigarettes and engaging in soft-spoken banter while nerve ends settled. They had found the incendiaries scattered in various nooks and crannies of the Palm Door, deac-

tivated and then dismantled the bombs, and finally had been able to give the All Clear signal. Watching the flow of uprooted humanity sweep back into the luxurious comfort of the hotel filled the bomb boys with esoteric satisfaction.

Only a couple of cops remained uptight. Henderson, the detective, was white-hot while Will Gentry sat low in the chair behind his desk. Thick body hunched together in one large lump, chin propped on interlocked fists and bulldog face dark as he let Henderson rant.

"Shayne," bristled Henderson, shooting another dagger look at the redhead, "What is it with you? How come you have to be a One-Man Gang? You know you got Mitchell killed, don'tcha?"

"Bull," muttered Shayne. He sat straddling a straightback chair, the chair on its back legs and propped against an office wall. He didn't bother to look up as he continued to pick dried mud spots from his suit front.

"They would have made *Mitchell* their hostage, taken him to the hotel!" Henderson roared.

"Where he'd been wasted the minute they walked into the lobby," said Shayne.

The redhead dropped the chair forward suddenly to its front legs, stood, hitched up his

trousers. His rugged face was granite.

"Sometimes, Henderson," he snapped, "you have to pick rocks out of the air, fire them back. You can't always sit on your duff and wait for them to form a nice little pile at your feet."

Shayne turned abruptly from the livid Henderson, looked at Gentry. "You satisfied, Will? Your people found everybody they wanted at the Palm Door? No loose threads dangling?"

Gentry was slow to reply. And then all he growled was, "I'm satisfied."

Shayne stared hard at his longtime friend. Gentry returned the stare. Neither man moved. Shayne knew the chief was hacked because a private eye had not knuckled under, had not cooperated with investigative bodies. It was one of the rare times the eye and the chief had not been on the same team.

Shayne finally turned. No words, no attempt at laying out logic; was going to be salve this night's work. That would come only with time, reconstruction, weighing and reweighing.

He was in the doorway when Gentry said flatly, "The FBI people are angry as hell with you, Mike."

Shayne went on out of the police building. Had he detected

a hint of threat in Will Gentry's words?

He snorted and turned into the shadowed parking lot. He got into the Buick and wheeled out of the lot to the street, where he caught himself searching for trailing headlights. He clamped the steering wheel, hunched forward and drove to The Beef House on Miami Avenue.

The case was finished.

In the next ninety minutes, he slowly polished off the largest steak in the house, savored all of the trimmings and finally sat back with a fresh cognac clamped in his right fist. He noticed the young man gradually. He was seated alone and across the room. His face was turned away from Shayne, yet the redhead felt he was watching, probably had been for a long time.

Shayne made a move as if he might be leaving the booth. The young man stood, turned to the detective. The redhead watched him approach. Did the FBI want him this much?

The young man stood before Shayne. He was neat, modishly

attired. He remained stonefaced as he reached and picked up Shayne's dinner tab. Then he took an envelope from an inside coat pocket and placed it on the booth table.

"Mr. Shayne," the young man said, "Mr. Cicerone says the envelope contains a bonus for a job quickly and well performed. He is very happy with the result. As an added token of appreciation, he also says that you may wish to convey to certain friends that they can close their files on the bombing of a bank the other night. The matter has been disposed of."

The young man turned and walked to the front of The Beef House. He stopped and paid the two tabs, then disappeared.

Shayne finished the cognac. He wondered what swamp would eventually cough up the bodies of the bank robbers—or would they ever surface? It was fifty-fifty, either way.

He rose, put the envelope in his coat pocket. Suddenly he was weary—and he had a strong hunch it was to be a good night for sleeping. The city seemed once again secure.

THE CORPSE THAT WALKED AWAY

The Miami redhead is both hunter and hunted in next month's new Mike Shayne short novel.

by BRETT HALLIDAY

The \$3,000,000 Cop

Some cop was richer when the elevator reached the basement, and accusations flew wild and fast in the hunt for the man who had proved that what goes up doesn't always have to come down!

by JERRY JACOBSON



THE FIRST WIND Camus caught of the matter was innocuous. A burn-team was taking a load of confiscated drugs from Narcotics Property Section in the Detective Division on the ninth floor of the Public Safety Building to the furnaces in the basement of the County Courthouse building. There it would be burned.

Sam delivered the news. He was on leave-days and wandering the building. His wife, who was ill, was bedded down at home, and to Leschi the night was still young.

The department's ranking pusher of trivia, Leschi indicated to Camus it was the

largest burn in the city's history. Easily half a ton of various narcotics. Camus sustained a brief yawn, steering it directly into Leschi's big Greek eyes. Crestfallen that Camus did not exactly appear to be thirsting before the fount of his random knowledge, Sam Leschi turned and left.

Material-burns were not all that remarkable, to Camus' way of thinking. Happening about once every three months, they were the responsibility of the Narcotics Division.

It was a four-man detail: an executive-level officer from the State Board of Pharmacy, a detective from Narcotics Division

A New SAM LESCHI Novelet



and two city patrolmen as guards. From the Public Safety Building drugs were taken to the basement of the courthouse building. There the foursome was met by a city maintenance superintendent, who thereupon shoveled and heaved the drugs harvest into a smokeless, high-intensity burning furnace.

For intrigue and danger, Camus guessed the entire detail ranked somewhere just above taking out the department's trash.

Camus submerged his mind in other matters, not even noting the time of Sam Leschi's interruption, except to think the detective really ought to have been home with his sick spouse.

It was after midnight when Camus looked up from his paperwork. The ten-desk I.A. section stirred with no other moving objects but himself and an electric clock on a wall, which now read out to 12:25 a.m. He collected his reports, dropped them into the lower-right drawer of his desk and locked it.

His mind's eye fashioned a beautiful view of his wife asleep, her honey-blonde hair wildly soft on her pillow like spilled honey. In a little while, she would be stirring awake even before the alarm on the bedtable sounded, to put on the coffee for him.

Camus had one arm into his suit coat when his phone rang. It was Captain Ebberly. Camus dumped his coat fully back onto the steel shoulder of his chair.

"Make a note of the time, Camus," Ebberly said flatly. "As of this moment, we have the formal investigation of an internal theft."

Camus pulled a work sheet from the stack in his top-right desk drawer and scribbled the time, 12:27 a.m., and the date, March fifteenth, in the black-edged box in the upper right corner.

"At 12:18 a.m., Detective Lieutenant Joel Truitt, Narcotics Division, reported to me the theft of one-thousand three-hundred-seventy pounds of controlled substances, the theft first detected in the basement furnace room of the County Courthouse Building. The substances included marijuana, pharmaceuticals in capsulized doses and five pounds of Turkish heroin, fine-grade, from Afyon opium."

Camus was startled at the news. Scribbling quickly, his pencil snapped and he grabbed up another. "Leschi didn't say anything about that burn containing heroin," he grumbled into the phone.

"Sam Leschi?" said Captain Ebberly. "Isn't he on leave-days with a sick wife?"

"He got her bedded down at home and came in to make a nuisance of himself. About the heroin. Is that the same stuff the narcs let cook itself down in that rented house out in the Delmeyer district about three months back?"

"Best grade smack we've turned up in this city so far," said Ebberly. "And the biggest ring with a single noose. A chemist, a French buyer, two local wholesalers and a half dozen dealers. Hate to see this go on Truitt's record."

Camus had heard of Truitt, but hadn't met him. In Internal Affairs, Camus' roost for the past five years, the only cops a man knew personally were the ones he broke in with as a rookie and the bad ones he had to investigate.

"Where'd Truitt work before Narcotics Division?" Camus asked.

"Some in Vice, a little in Homicide. Very gutsy guy. I personally wish I had twenty more in the department like him, which makes putting this comedy of errors on his record even more distasteful."

"You'd think an action-guy like that would thumb his nose at a materials-burn—dish it off to some hotshot fresh off the campus," Camus said.

"He might have, he tells me," Ebberly replied, "but most of

Narcotics Division was already working the streets at that hour. For the first time in weeks, Truitt found himself to be the only guy watching the shop."

"What about the dope?" Camus asked.

"It's not going anywhere. I had both buildings sealed off the minute Truitt called in from the Courthouse basement. I've detailed everybody to guard exits, windows, doors. A full quarantine. Nobody gets out of the building until he's checked out—body, car and gear. Somebody may have ripped off some dope as easy as downtown on a foggy Saturday night, but nobody's going to leave the building with it."

"You've started the floor-by-floor and room-by-room, then," Camus said.

"Top to bottom, both buildings," Ebberly confirmed.

"Who was the Board of Pharmacy man on the detail?"

"Dr. Myron Stone. Little guy. Bad eyes. Bad body. Could save a lot of money when he takes vacation trips. He could put himself in an envelope and go anywhere in the States for ten cents."

Camus made a note of Stone's name. "You already talked with Truitt and Dr. Stone?"

"Just finished. I wanted a few words with them both sepa-

rately before sending them up to you—just be sure their preliminary statements jibe."

"What's their story?" Camus turned the report sheet over to the "General information" blank.

"Truitt admits to a procedural error," Captain Ebberly said. "He signed for the materials in Property Section—two covered canvas bins of controlled substances, all accounted for. Stone was with him.

"Where did the procedural error take place?" Camus wanted to know.

"In Narcotics Property. After the Property Officer signed out the materials and physically transferred them into Truitt's custody, he noticed Truitt didn't have his guard detail. An oversight on everyone's part. Truitt forgot to get his guards and the Property Officer didn't make sure Truitt had a guard detail before he released the drugs."

"Why didn't Truitt simply sign the drugs back into Property and then go after a couple of guards?"

"Well, it's a pretty breezy shift, the night watch," said Ebberly. "Nothing shaking, no big deal. The rules become—relaxed, I guess is the kindest way to put it."

CAMUS was aware of the department's procedures and the

strict penalties for breaking a burn-team, or not assembling a complete team before initiating the run. Sixty days suspension and loss of pay. "They didn't compound the burn-team error by wandering the corridors, did they?"

"Not really," said Ebberly, "Truitt used his head on that score. He did the logical thing under the tight circumstances. He took Stone with him, and the drugs, up in the security elevator to the tenth floor, to the county and city jails. His thinking was to enlist a couple of patrolmen, logging in drunks and warrant delinquents, as an escort."

"That's what I would have done," said Camus. "There isn't a single other place in the building where he could have gotten guards under a controlled situation. So they went up in the security elevator with the bins."

"Right. They had the drugs right there beside them in the elevator, nice and cozy. No problems. They arrive at the tenth and get out. Both Truitt and Stone step out of the elevator and into the jails area and commence looking for a couple of likely candidates."

"Oh-oh," said Camus, darkly. "Second error. Two bins of drugs left unattended in an elevator."

"Yeah, and before Truitt could hit the auto-stop button, he and Stone lost the elevator. Zip, the doors closed and down went a payload of three million in sweet merchandise."

"How many floors? To the main floor? The basement?"

"Now that's the curious thing here," said Captain Ebberly. "The elevator descended only one floor, back to the Police Divisions. A smart caper. Took timing. Whoever planned it knew the main floor still was pretty active with night foot traffic. And the thief or thieves couldn't be sure the basement was going to be clear in all those corridors, while they searched for an exit out of the building.

"So apparently they decided to unload the drugs on the ninth floor, the Detective and Patrol Divisions. Anybody who doesn't smell an inside job working by now, has lost his sense of smell. Has to be, a cop or a detective as an accomplice, somebody who knew when the hallway would be clear, or could keep it clear. And someone who knew precisely how many division offices were occupied and by whom."

Ebberly's voice stopped to consider something. He coughed self-consciously. "Curious about Sam Leschi being in the building this particular night. At



these particular hours. During this particular incident." There was definite accusation in his voice. "Was Leschi with you at the time of the theft?" Captain Ebberly asked Camus.

"No, he wasn't, sir. I was alone in I.A. Section. Now that it's been mentioned, I have to say I've no idea where Leschi was at the time of the heist."

"We'd do best to keep him in mind and in sight. He had all the needed information. Knew about the burn detail. Comes and goes in every department unquestioned, so he had opportunity. And three million is motive for anyone" said Ebberly.

He paused. "Well—let me go on with the narrative here. The

elevator descends to the ninth floor and is delayed there roughly five minutes. An elevator foul-up, he and Stone decide, because no one gets on to descend to the main floor. They wait. And pray. Three million in drugs missing, I'd call the Pope or round up a stack of Bibles myself and start praying.

"But everything seems to be working itself out without disastrous results. Whatever made the elevator malfunction corrected itself. Who knows from elevators? Only Mr. Otis. At any rate, when the elevator returns to the tenth floor, there are the two bins, just where they'd been placed by Truitt, looking completely undisturbed."

"They get their guard detail?" Camus asked.

"No luck. No cops available. But they still had the drugs intact, or thought they did. Neither Truitt nor Stone, at this point, wanted to flirt with fate by making any more delays, so they simply got into the elevator by themselves and took the bins down to the basement. They transported them through the tunnel into the courthouse furnace room, removed the lids for the burn and instead of the drugs, discovered about six-hundred pounds of building bricks."

"Bricks? What kind? Where from?"

"Stolen by the drug thieves from the maintenance area of the furnace room, we think," Ebberly said.

Camus was jotting it all down. The time-span troubled him. Five minutes to replace drugs with building bricks seemed like awfully fast work. And how did the thieves manage to haul that many bricks up to the Detective Divisions of the ninth floor without being spotted?

"How do you figure it so far?" Camus asked.

"Well, the obvious explanation is the thieves carted the drugs off down a hallway of the ninth to a rear stairwell and from there to another floor of the building where there were no night workers and where the drugs could be stashed until morning. Thousands of people coming into the buildings to work. A perfect, uncontrolled situation in which to remove the drugs from the building."

"Let's not get trapped by obvious explanations," Camus said.

"Have you a better one?"

"No. But it's still early. I think we ought to keep our minds open. You keep staring at a single facet of a diamond and you miss seeing ninety-nine percent of it."

"If we only had more time," said Ebberly, with a wistfulness shared equally by Camus. Time. They had only five hours. Five hours to smell out those drugs. That was all.

"Leschi had no real business being here tonight," Camus said to Captain Ebberly. "And that fact disturbs me like it does you more than just a little."

"No one is off the hook, of course. Not Truitt or Stone. Not the duty officers in Narcotics Property, no one. Not even Sam Leschi."

For a moment, Camus pushed the dark spectre of the idle and curiously adrift Sam Leschi aside. "Whose job was it to destroy the drugs in the furnace room?" he asked Ebberly.

"A night-shift maintenance foreman named Kuros," said Ebberly. "Milos Kuros. Clean record. Twelve years in civil service."

"Hmm," grunted Camus, not seeing much of a suspect in Kuros. Still, it wasn't wise to scratch any names summarily from the list. He said to Ebberly, "You're holding off on the formal investigation until Monday?"

"Right. No sense rushing it. We want those drugs first. We want a secure situation here."

"But you want me to begin taking statements."

"Informal, preliminary statements, yes," said Captain Ebberly. "Catch someone with his drawers down. This soon after the mad scramble to relocate those drugs, we just might catch somebody making a statement that doesn't jibe with what everybody else is putting down. We could use another man to take it down."

"Not another soul here," said Camus, glancing at the yawning vacancy of the long, empty room.

"Just had a thought," said Ebberly, abruptly now. "What about Leschi? I can sign him off his leave-days and tie him to your coattails for the rest of the morning. If Leschi *was* here tonight for the heist, having him within arm's reach of you just might tip somebody's hand. Where is he now?"

"No idea. Like you said, the guy's all over the building, like wallpaper."

"Find him and hire him," said Ebberly and hung up.

CAMUS hung up the phone. How did you find a guy like Sam Leschi in a building this size? You didn't. He found you. He simple turned up, or you tracked him down. Which Camus proceeded to do, finding him on the fifth try, in Vice Devision.

"Think you can tear yourself

away and get up here?" Camus asked.

"I don't know, Camus. Hopper and DeGrilio are running a pretty hot flick. They copped it at Gros III last night, and Hopper says we haven't even come to the best parts yet."

"Just get up here, Leschi. Ebberly has signed you off leave-days. He likes the way you nose into other people's business. He thinks you might be able to smell out those drugs."

"I'm going to help win one for the Gipper, eh? Sure, I don't mind. Hell, this flick'll be in the evidence locker six months, at least."

Before a half hour had passed, Leschi had joined Camus, and Truitt had arrived to make his personal report. When the report was concluded, Truitt read from a printed card handed to him:

"This official statement was freely given, without duress and with full knowledge that any portion thereof may be used in evidence against me. The date is March fifteenth 1974. The time is 0115 hours. Joel Truitt, Detective Lieutenant, Narcotics Division, Badge 1225."

Camus punched off the tape recorder and watched Truitt as his steady hand returned the printed card to Camus. This

was Camus' first face-to-face meeting with the rumored super-narc and scourge of drug traffickers in New York City and Camus admitted to being a little disarmed by his boyish candor and rough charm.

Nine years as a street cop hadn't turned him into a flip fatalist or an insensitive pragmatist to whom one more over-dosed junkie or knife-slasher pusher was simply an entry on yellow sheets. He was sincere and subdued and seemed anxious that the record be correct.

When Truitt stood, Camus' attention was again drawn to his slightly flashy dress: pastel-pink shirt, the wide garish tie, the tan double-knit suit. The total aspect of the man made Camus recall when he himself had been a young and single city detective; he was mildly surprised when the precise year could not be dredged up out of a fogged history of his fifty-three years.

"Captain Ebberly has instructed me to caution you not to interfere in any way with the investigation of this matter," Camus told Truitt.

Truitt smiled tightly. For an instant the smile seemed to be wry and secret; in the next instant not. "Which means I am considered both a witness and a suspect."

"It's part of the job, Truitt, you know that. Your record doesn't show so much as a parking ticket. No one is going to be railroaded and no one is going to be presumed guilty until proven innocent. You have my word on that."

Truitt nodded. "Am I free to call it a night now? I've been on-shift like a subway conductor who can't figure out how to stop his car."

"Go home and get some sleep, Truitt. We'll be in touch with you soon enough."

Camus escorted Truitt to the door of the interrogation room and let him out into the narrow, white-walled hallway, where Sam Leschi and Dr. Stone of the Board of Pharmacy seemed to chop off their own hallway conversation like the drop of an axe.

The sparse, chalk-faced Stone nudged a pair of pop-bottle glasses up the sweaty bridge of his nose, smiled stiffly at Camus and departed down the hall with jabby little steps, perfectly measured as though he were learning some new faddish straight-line dance by the numbers. Truitt took the same path a moment later, his strides long but tired and not lifting much from the white tile beneath them.

"How did it go with Stone?" Camus asked Sam Leschi when

both interviewees had disappeared.

"Like a guy who's been rehearsing ten years for a five-minute role in a movie," said Leschi.

"Bring it in and we'll slip him on the recorder."

Stone's taped statement timed out to a scant twelve seconds less than Lieutenant Truitt's. Were the two tapes blow-up photos of snowflakes, the record would have shown the first instance of perfect duplication.

"They got together over their stories," surmised Camus, needlessly. "Nobody's being kidded there."

Leschi laughed that off with mild derision. "So patrolmen and homicide detectives put their heads together, too, when there's a shooting board. The department encourages it to maintain our shining, blue image."

"A shooting board, yes. But not a materials-theft."

Leschi arched his eye-brows and lit a fresh cheroot. "So Truitt misses an elevator button when he goes looking for a guard detail in the City Jail and loses a load of drugs for a minute or so. It happens, Camus. Human error happens."

"And is it also believable human error for a doctor to leave that same elevator?"

"You mean Dr. Stone?" said Leschi.

"Of course Stone," spat Camus, irritated at Leschi's feigned slowness. "In order for those drugs to have been taken without witnesses, that elevator had to be empty of passengers when it opened at the ninth floor."

Sam Leschi's cheroot seemed to be burning unevenly. Ragged tears of flame were destroying the perfectly formed head of gray ash. "But you don't think Truitt was involved in the theft," he said.

"The thought crossed my mind, Sam, yes. Just as the actions of Dr. Stone move *him* closer toward guilt."

"Okay. I got it so far. Now, what about the outside man? The guy who removed the drugs from the elevator and carted them off down the hall to a back staircase?"

"Any one or more of fifty cops and detectives on-duty tonight could have filled those shoes," Camus said. "Including either one or both of the two duty officers in Narcotics Property Section. Who are they? Durkin and Vanderhoof?"

"Durkin and Vanderhoof, check," said Sam Leschi, looking at his data sheet. "Wouldn't hurt to get preliminary statements from them, too. Shouldn't take more than a few

minutes. We could lock their section while we're taping. Hell, there aren't enough drugs left in the Section-three Vault now to give a flea a decent high."

"Get 'em up here," Camus decided as his right hand went out for the phone.

THE PHONE CALL, the time, the paperwork and the tape all could have been saved for some more important matter.

Sergeants Frank Durkin and Peter Vanderhoof had both been present in Narcotics Property Section when Truitt and Dr. Stone showed up to collect the drugs for the burn. The property release took place at 11:46 p.m., Vanderhoof releasing with Durkin witnessing. From that time until Lieutenant Truitt reported the drugs missing at 12:18 a.m., neither man left the confines of Narcotics Property's cages and vaults.

"Well, this all leaves us pretty much out in the cold for the present," Sam Leschi said to Camus after the two property officers had been sent back to work. "Wonder how they're doing on the building search? Nine floors in four hours. They'll never do it."

Camus grunted noncommittally, finding more fascination in Leschi's increasing caution. Leschi clearly was showing he

had no stomach for this investigation.

Leschi pressed the remnant of a cheroot into an ash tray on Camus' desk. For an instant their eyes caught and then unhooked like a needle snagging on clothing.

"Sam?"

"Yah, Camus?"

"You never mentioned where *you* were when those drugs were taken out of the elevator."

Leschi's extracting of a fresh cigar from inside his jacket was not done with his usual grace. "You never asked, Camus."

"Well, I'm asking now."

"I was around, Camus. Like I told you."

"Specifically," Camus bore in now, not taking any care to be cute about it.

"You suspect me?" Leschi's words hung heavily in the air.

"Everybody," Camus replied. The air cleared a little.

"I stuck my nose into Homicide for a few minutes," Leschi told him.

"Talk with anybody there?"

"Yeah, as a matter of fact, I did. I chewed a little fat with Yantis, who's handling that night intruder killing out in Blue Point Park. Yantis thinks the burglar was the wife's ex-lover, who wouldn't let go, thinks she lured him out to the house in her husband's absence to burn him and bury her past."



"Where else did you drop in?"

"Just about everywhere, Camus. You know me. I looked into Burglary and Juvenile. I even dropped in on Bones Hemstead in the Chem Lab."

"At a little after midnight, where were you?" Camus said.

"I don't keep a second-by-second log, Camus. Louise is down with the flu. I got her bedded and then came on downtown."

"And you became so engrossed in everyone else's work, you just lost track of time."

"That's the way it goes down, Camus." Abruptly, Leschi pulled himself out of his chair. "Now, unless you got any more Sherlock Holmes-type questions for me, sport, I'm going to take a trip down to the coffee room. I'm also going to blow open a couple of windows because suddenly I'm beginning not to like the air in here."

Camus held his tongue as Leschi stormed from the room, and instead snatched up his ringing phone.

"Camus, Internal Affairs." His tone might have left a faint neck bite at the other end, but he was justifiably steamed at Leschi.

"Am I a pressed ham and Swiss cheese on rye, Camus?"

"Sorry, Captain," Camus apologized to Ebberly. "It's Leschi. We just played cat and mouse and the mouse won."

"Well, time and space are beginning to run out for all the bad little mice in this community," Ebberly said. "The building search is down to the sixth floor and steaming right along. That floor ought to be completely checked out by three. It's snail's work, but we can't go at it any other way. This building is a cubby-hole-lover's dream. What about the statements you took from Truitt and Dr. Stone?"

"A case of who's the mimic

and who's the dummy," said Camus. "Same with the two duty-officers in Narcotics Property."

"I wasn't expecting any miracles," Ebberly said. "This heist has probably been in the works for months. Nobody's going to panic now and shoot off his mouth. They pulled it off cleanly, and then found a pretty secure place in the Public Safety Building or the County Courthouse to stash the drugs. That's the cat-bird seat, Camus."

A pause shot the room with heavy silence. As Camus peered at the wallclock, its slender black minute-hand leapt another minute to 2:35 a.m. Time now seemed to have a mind of its own, high on speed.

"You check out Kuros yet?" Camus heard Ebberly's voice erupt in his ear.

Camus blinked and rubbed his eyes. There was no remembering the last time he slept. Thursday? Wednesday? "Who?" he asked.

"Milos Kuros, the maintenance superintendent who was to have burned the drugs in the furnaces," Ebberly repeated.

"Oh, yeah. Kuros. I remember, now. But why Kuros? He's a working stiff, a midnight mole who threads pipe and turns up steam valves and reads dirty magazines. Who's

going to include a jerk like that in a three-million dollar drug heist?"

"Probably nobody," said Ebberly, "but somebody walked off with a lot of bricks from down there and Kuros may have seen more than anyone knows."

"Could be he might recognize pictures of Stone, Truitt or Leschi," said Camus. "I'll take some along."

"Where is Leschi now?" Captain Ebberly asked the question sharply.

"The air in here became a little too much for him, so he beat a speedy exit for the coffee room."

"Well, take him with you when you question Milos Kuros," said Ebberly. "Maybe his physical presence will jog Kuros' memory better and faster than a photograph."

But Leschi wasn't in the coffee room. The spiggot of the large coffee urn dripped coffee at long intervals, but it always leaked and that wasn't a certain indication Leschi had been there. The exit for coffee had been just an excuse to get out from under Camus' accusative presence.

Or an excuse to slip away for a quick check on the cache of stolen drugs, perhaps even to move them onto an upper floor that had already been searched. Camus wondered. Leschi could

be the thief. He'd been acting strangely enough around Headquarters lately.

Camus went back out into the vacant hallway. His footfalls bounced in loud clicks off the walls and high ceiling. Past the one security and two full-service elevators, quite distant, janitors moved back and forth at work beyond the glass doors of Traffic Violations. Suddenly Camus thought he heard footfalls just missing his own by a slender beat. He whirled, but there was no one. It had been an edgy night. And now he was hearing footsteps that were not there.

He shrugged and punched the button for the security elevator. He rode it to the basement, his neck still crawling with the feeling someone was on his shoulder.

CAMUS STEPPED out when the doors hissed open. His nostrils twitched at the sudden odor of musty air into which he walked. This deep in the ground, earth fumes seemed to proliferate, like poisonous flowers in a greenhouse.

His steps barely sounded on the rough concrete as he moved along the dimly lighted corridor under the length of the Public Safety Building, into the channel that crossed under the city street, and finally into another

corridor along the length of the County Courthouse.

Here the atmosphere began to heat as he approached the boiler and furnace room. The whine of generators began to grow in Camus' ears and he was conscious of traveling the same path over which the two canvas bins had moved less than four hours earlier. He glanced down. In the concrete, faint, fresh scratches could be seen where the steel wheels of the bins had skidded and scraped under the weight of the bricks.

Camus pushed through the big double-doors of the courthouse maintenance shops and the generator whines rose sharply. The battleship-gray-painted floor glistened, reminding Camus of a Navy destroyer from his martial past.

He called out Milos Kuros' name but no one answered. The huge furnace loomed ahead of him. It had two steel doors set in its massive face about four feet apart. The thing looked even more ancient than the courthouse building itself.

Though its face was slightly warped, the furnace's sides and rear rose in straight faces of red brick, eight feet in the air. It was cold to Camus' touch, making him wonder how often it was used.

The sudden appearance of the

bearish Milos Kuros from around the furnace's left side startled Camus slightly. Beneath a pair of blue, bibbed overalls, the man wore no undershirt. Black chest hair raged menacingly above the too-small bib.

Kuros' smile was stupidly crooked, as if he'd once run out a wall instead of a door. "Who are you? There's no admittance down here."

Camus showed Milos Kuros his badge and saw the queer smile slacken. "Oh," Kuros nodded. "About the drugs. They was bricks. Nothing but bricks."

Along a far wall beyond Kuros, several white canvas bins were lined in parallel fashion against a white wall, beneath a row of pressure and temperature gages.

"Those the bins they came down in?" Camus asked.

Kuros nodded, huge thumbs hooked in the tops of his overalls. "First two. Last four bins hold compressed scrap paper and old city manuals."

Camus walked over and glanced down into the first two bins. Something about their interiors seemed curiously inconsistent with the facts he already knew; but what it could be escaped him. He glanced down the wide, well-lighted hallway, which ran further into

the depths of the building, away from the double doors. Red bricks were neatly stacked in a three-foot-square rack against the wall.

Camus strolled over, stopped at the tier and examined it. They were Belgian road bricks, more durable than those made commercially in America. The concrete floor around the stack showed a light litter of chips and residue.

He turned back, only to be startled by the sudden presence of the hulking Greek maintenance superintendent.

"Used the bricks to build a new supply room," he told Camus. "Down on the right."

"These the bricks the drug thieves stole to put into the bins?"

"About a third of them, yah," Milos Kuros said, whose wide, stolid eyes were growing edgy.

"Mind if I take a look at the room you built?" Camus asked. "I do a little home carpentry myself, when I can drag body and soul away from the pro football games. I'd like to see your placement of beams and struts."

"Can't," said Kuros, tersely. "Covered with plasterboard."

"Down this way, is it?" Camus said, walking slowly away from Kuros.

"I don't like nobody messing down at this end of the mainte-

nance area," warned Kuros in a brooding tone, as he followed Camus, pawing at his arm.

It was fifty feet to the last room on the right. Camus pushed inside and found a light switch on the wall. The interior walls *were* plasterboarded. The room contained large drums of cleaning agents, waxes, paints. Camus returned to the door, stopped and rapped on the inside wall with his knuckles. It rang hollowly. He looked at Kuros. "Brick?"

"For insulation," said Kuros, almost too quickly.

Camus smiled. "Indeed."

They returned to the furnace room. Camus stopped at a workbench and casually passed his eyes over the tools and junk: mallets, hammers, an array of pliers, strewn sandpaper, a small blow-torch, wrenches, pipe sections—A small shock raced through Camus' mind. A blow-torch. He put his palm to it and felt an infinitesimal warmth.

"This been used lately?"

Milos Kuros enormous mouth dropped open. "What been used lately?"

"The blow-torch."

Kuros' eyes seemed to look around for help. "No," he said. "Not in a couple of weeks."

"Kuros," Camus said, "that's the wrong answer."

The black eyes narrowed and

became as ominous as slits in steel bunkers. "What do you mean, that's the wrong answer? I don't know what the law is, but maybe you aren't supposed to be down here without a warrant and some other kind of paper."

"Relax, Kuros," said Camus, uneasily. "I'm with Internal Affairs Division. And the basement qualifies as an internal area where affairs take place. What's the depth of these furnaces here? Looks about five feet or so. Got a tape handy?"

"Got no tape. I think you better forget about the tape and get on out of here."

"Nonsense, Kuros," said Camus, searching the top of Kuros' workbench. "Here we go. Just zip this out and take a little reading."

Kuros wasn't stopping him yet, but Camus couldn't be sure how long the brute passivity would continue. In a single motion, he hooked the tape on the front edge of the furnace and drew it down the length of the near side, from front to back.

"I've got a good eye for depths. Five feet, three inches," he said.

"So?"

Camus moved to the back of the furnace and searched with his eyes along the quarter-inch ribs of cement mortar welding brick to brick and row to row.

Something about shoulder or chest level, he thought as his eyes swept the rows, the odors of sweat and grease close by his side:

And then he saw it. A foot-square section of brick mortared a sandy, whitish color, as if the small section had been knocked out and then hastily re-bricked, its mortar quick-dried. With a blow torch. The furnace walls themselves were of ordinary American red building brick, of course, perfectly fine enough to contain the heat generated in a high-intensity-burn, smokeless furnace. But only high-quality, closely molecular Belgian road brick would serve thieves' purposes.

Camus turned and flashed a wide, fearless grin at Kuros' murky face. "Wonder what the furnace measures from the inside, Kuros? Front to back." Camus jerked out a length of the steel tape to about four feet. "Let me guess. I'd say about three feet."

Camus unhinged the large left-hand furnace door, let the tape snap to a rigid blade of steel and then slowly plunged it into the darkened cave of brick, scraping it along the furnace floor. Two feet, two-and-a-half... and then it was going rigid again in Camus light grasp, bending as it encountered an immovable obstruc-

tion. Camus bent and read the last inch which could not squeeze itself inside.

"Curious thing here, Kuros," he said. "We've got ourselves a wall which measures five-feet three-inches deep on the outside, but only three-feet two-inches on the inside."

"I don't know nothing about that," said Milos Kuros, his breath coming faster on Camus' neck. "Your tape has hit a raised brick on the furnace's floor."

"And your imagination's hit rock bottom, Kuros. Tell me about that new supply room of yours. There isn't a brick in it, is there, Kuros? Of course there isn't. But you had to have a valid reason for that Belgian brick when you requisitioned to build that three-foot sealed vault at the back of the furnaces. Belgian brick specifically, because it's the most heat-resistant brick made. To keep a cache of drugs from heat-deterioration, Kuros?"

The dark eyes danced in their deep sockets like rocks beneath dark shoals under an onslaught of waves.

"The dullness and sheer maintenance of the night-shift gave you plenty of time and privacy to construct the wall inside the furnace," Camus kept hammering as the confused Milos Kuros backed in

the direction of his workbench. "Two or three hours would have accomplished the job, am I right, Kuros?

"Tonight, before the drug heist, you knocked out a section of the rear wall of the furnace large enough to accomodate the largest of the materials—the ten-pound poly-bags of marijuana—and the pills and heroin. After the drugs were brought down and stashed in your little cubby-hole, you rebuilt the wall and fast-dried the mortar with a blow torch. Fast-dried mortar becomes sandy and sticks out like a sore thumb, Kuros."

Milos Kuros was still backing for his workbench. Camus wasn't taking him yet because he wasn't certain whether the man was recoiling from the sheer force and persistence of Camus' accusations, or retreating for a weapon. Camus wasn't drawing his service revolver until Milos Kuros showed clear intent to assault.

"Was it you who punched the elevator-button on the ninth floor near the Detective Divisions, Kuros? Or was it Sam Leschi? Someone else? What's the full cast of characters in this blue drama, Kuros? Does it include Lieutenant Truitt and Dr. Stone? Or just Stone? Come on, Kuros. We're going to go around like this all morning

until you begin coughing up some answers."

Kuros was sidling to his left like a fat snake, while his eyes were sliding right. Camus unbuttoned his suit coat and kept his own eyes trained on Milos Kuros' right hip.

They both saw the huge, rubberheaded mallet at the same instant. Kuros grabbed it, but Camus' draw was faster. "Drop that mallet, Kuros, or they'll be putting that arm in plastic bags."

Kuros' fatty lips grimaced. His hairy fingers released their grip on the mallet. It fell to the gray-painted floor, bouncing crazily out of Kuros' reach, almost to the doors.

"I got nothing to say," Kuros spat. "I got rights. I don't got to tell you the way to the restroom. And I got a right to a lawyer."

"Those drugs never left those bins, did they Kuros? It would have taken longer than five minutes to replace drugs with six-hundred pounds of bricks. And the bins would have shown dust and brick residue when I looked them over."

But Kuros wasn't biting. "You got nothing on me, no proof I did any of this. I work here, that's all."

Suddenly a new voice spoke from Camus' left, toward the doors to the maintenance shop.

The voice of Joel Truitt. "Mr. Kuros does have the right of counsel and of silence. Drop your piece, Camus or I'll waste you like old newspaper."

ONLY TRUITT was armed now, with his issue .38. At his shoulder stood the ashen-faced Dr. Stone, using Truitt as a semi-barracade. Camus saw that Stone wasn't armed.

Truitt was beaming. Almost in a complimentary way, he said: "Camus, I didn't give you a prayer of putting this thing together, but damned if you didn't hit on it right down the line."

Camus smiled, but he couldn't keep a trace of happiness out of it. Kuros retrieved his service revolver and made the twosome a trio. He handed the pistol to Truitt who jammed it into his belt.

"Where's Leschi?" Camus said to Truitt. "Bringing up the rear?"

Truitt laughed incredulously. "Leschi? That kibitzing zero? Hell, that jerk even bungles driving in to work."

"Then he's not in on the heist?"

"You keep a caper like this stripped to the bone, Camus," Truitt answered, with a foxy grin spreading on his young face. "I had enough trouble working this number out so we

could drop the two-man guard detail."

"A pie cuts much easier into three pieces than five," said Dr. Stone, punching his pop-bottle glasses up his nose as he spoke. "Just the essential people in the materials-burn team."

It looked to Camus now that this pie wasn't going to feel the blade of a knife at all. Truitt had a crooked look on his face. And unnoticed by either Milos Kuros or Dr. Stone, he had taken two half-steps backward and away from them.

"About the manner in which the pie is going to be sliced, Stone," Truitt said now. "Just one piece. All for me."

It was everybody-step-to-the-rear time: In a moment, Milos Kuros and Dr. Stone had joined Camus. Stone removed his glasses and leered at Truitt in a squint of extreme pique. Milos Kuros was crestfallen, standing in dumb, duped silence.

"The bricks that weren't there made a nice touch, I thought," Truitt said, spewing an evil little chuckle all over the room. "That and the elevator idea threw all the suspicion up to the ninth floor and completely away from the basement. Until you began nosing around, Camus, we had the perfect heist."

"It does appear you've got a

bigger mess on your hands than before," Camus said.

"Nothing that can't be swept into a nice, neat, believable pile," Truitt grinned. "I held out some of those drugs. Some pills, a poly-bag of grass. I followed you down here, Camus, tipped your little conspiracy here with Stone and Kuros and had to waste all three of you. Presto! The trail is covered and I'm left with the haul free—and clear!"

"Take the drugs, Truitt!" Dr. Stone pleaded now. "Just let me live! I never wanted them in the first place!"

"You were never meant to have them in the first place, or you either, Kuros. Hell, I'm tapped into the drugline in this town better than the distributors and the pushers combined. It's my street, Stone. I know all the shooting galleries and all the dark holes in the walls and all the people who hide in them.

"I'm through being a \$12,000-a-year jerk sweeping society's dirt under its carpet. I'm through being this city's garbage man. I'm going into fresh ventures. And unfortunately for you and Kuros, there's no room for two civil servant clowns with no special skills or knowledge. And it also doesn't have room for one, slick-minded detective of Inter-

nal Affairs who made the mistake of walking into his own grave."

Throughout Truitt's egomaniacal backslapping, a separate act was taking place in the humming maintenance shop. It was taking place quite silently and quite completely out of Lieutenant Truitt's range of sight. But the act was being seen perfectly by Stone, Milos Kuros, and Camus, who prayed none of the others would choose this instant to speak or point.

No one did. The room was shot with one resounding silence of breathlessness until the black object blurred and swooped down onto the back of Truitt's skull, toppling him in a sudden heap, unconscious, on the concrete floor.

Camus swallowed uneasily. Breathing began in the room again. Sam Leschi bent and extracted one pistol from Truitt's belt and another from the floor at Truitt's right side. A wide grin was all over his face.

"Who are the bad guys here, Camus?"

"Everyone except you and me, I'm afraid," Camus told Leschi, as he quickly parted company from those with whom he had only moments before been joined.

"Where are the drugs?" Leschi said, looking around the massive, humming room.

"They'll keep," Camus said.

"Guess we ought to call upstairs for a requisition of handcuffs."

Camus nodded and went to the doors, where a phone was perched on the wall like a wren to the side of a barn.

"You were figuring me, while I was figuring Truitt, weren't you, Camus?" Leschi said.

"Believe me, Leschi, I'll never spread another rumor about you poking your nose into everybody else's business."

"Yeah, well, I get around."

"What made you hit on Truitt?" Camus asked.

"Little stuff. Like the way he was reluctant to go home after he put on that I'm-dead-tired act. Guy gets tired of this crazy place, he bolts out of the building like a rocket. So I stuck with him." Leschi held up the rubber mallet. "Department ought to plunge for a few gross of these. Good weight, good balance. And they can drop a guy like a dead horse."

"Do me a favor, Leschi? We get these guys hauled upstairs and logged in—go home?"

"Can't, old buddy," Sam Leschi grinned, flashing all his gleaming Greco-Spanish teeth. "Hopper and DeGrilio are gonna run the flick again. The second reel. Gotta make it, Camus. I don't have a key to the evidence locker."

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SHAKESPEARE'S LEFT EAR

Officer Furlow enjoyed his low-keyed existence as a hick cop. But when he faced a real mystery, he went after it with skill a big-city cop would envy.

by LAWRENCE TREAT

CLYDE FURLOW, second in command of the West Weston two-man police department, liked his job. He liked patrolling country roads, where he could stop off and hunt for wild mushrooms and herbs. He liked the friendliness of the town, where he was known and knew practically everybody. Being an omnivorous reader, he liked the independence of work that gave him time to spend an hour or two in the library whenever he felt like it.

Most of all, perhaps, he liked the occasional puzzle that police work presented him with. Privately, he thought there was more of a challenge in trying to find out who swiped Grandpa Nathan's red pajamas off the clothesline than in solving a gangland murder in New York or Chicago. And a lot safer, too. He was therefore almost

pleased on that Monday morning when the chief told him to look into the disappearance of a statue from the West Weston library.

Ellen Exeter was in charge. She'd left a high-paying job in the city in order to enjoy the peace and pace of small town living, and Clyde had liked her ever since the first time he saw her. He'd walked into the library with his walkie-talkie under his arm, introduced himself and said, "Mind if I keep this thing with me while I sit down?"

"Please leave it at the desk," Ellen said. "You don't have to worry about anybody taking it, do you? Not with a policeman here."

He studied her through his usual squint and decided that she had a dry although slightly twisted sense of humor. He



hitched up his belt, touched his revolver and said, "I wouldn't trust the police too much. But I have to have this thing next to me, in case there's an accident or something."

"Oh, of course," she said.

"But I didn't know that policemen read."

"This one does," he said, and marched over to the encyclopedia shelf and picked up volume three, *Bolivia to Cervantes*. He didn't expect to read

every word, all the way through to the last volume, but he had a five-year plan for covering most of it. And remembering it, too.

That, however, was a year ago, when he'd still been on volume three. Now, driving along West River Road in the blue and white police car, he told himself that if he'd seen less of Martha, he might have been well into volume five, instead of page ninety-four, volume three. He'd decided that Martha was well worth it, when he got the call from Chief Doty.

"Proceed to the West Weston library and find out who stole Ellen Exeter's statue."

That was all. The sun shone and the trees were budding and Clyde Furlow wondered about the statues in the library and could only recall three very ordinary plaster busts. There was Shakespeare, reigning on the top shelf slightly to the right of the desk at the entrance, there was Poe, surveying a collection of reference books, and there was the Unknown Reader with the racked skull in the children's section.

Furlow hoped the Unknown Reader was missing and that somebody had pitched it over the fence in the back yard, so that children wouldn't keep asking Ellen what it was read-

ing and why. He hoped, too, that he'd make some headway in volume three while he was at the library.

He found an angry Ellen presiding over the desk facing the entrance. "Clyde," she snapped out, "who in the world would want to steal a plaster bust? What for? You can't sell it or use it or even admire it. Who would want it?"

Before he answered, Clyde glanced at the top of the 818 shelf. Shakespeare should have been there, and wasn't. "Probably a kid's prank," Furlow said. "I can think of a few who would do that."

"And spill my ink; besides?" Ellen said. "It was all over the floor and I just finished cleaning up."

"Should have let me do it," Furlow remarked. "I'll tell you what, though. First of all, I'll notify the *Gazette* and ask them to do a feature story on who stole Shakespeare. After the publicity, whoever has it will probably be afraid to keep it. Two to one, I'll find it in the dump before the week is out."

"Shakespeare in the dump?" Ellen said, horrified. "Can't you arrange something better than that?"

Clyde Furlow, with his back to her, disregarded the remark. "There's some ink spilt along the shelves, too," he said. He

glanced at the volumes in the Shakespeare area—818 was a catch-all category, you never knew what you'd find there. On the lower shelves underneath the 818's stood the class year books of the Regional High School from 1937 down to the present. He had an impulse to look at his own year book, but we knew what it would have said about him—*Chief characteristic—squint. Ambition—to be a cop.*

He returned his attention to Ellen. "Do you use ink much?"

"Oh, no," she said. "But I keep a bottle on my desk, together with a plain, ordinary pen, to show children what we used to use. Most of them think the ball pen came down unchanged since Roman times."

"I see," he said thoughtfully. "Tell me—was there anything unusual about the Shakespeare bust? Any writing or marks of any kind? Any reason you can think of why somebody might want it?"

"You're trying to make a mystery of it, but the answer is no. It was a plain, ordinary plaster statue that nobody would be interested in, except—"

"Except what?"

"I'm being silly, perhaps, but last Saturday a man with a beard came in. A man with a black beard, it covered his

whole face so that all you could see were his eyes, except that the beard fascinated me and I hardly even noticed the eyes. They were rather light, I think. He kept looking at that shelf and fingering some of the books and then putting them down, until finally I asked him whether I could help him, if there was anything in particular that he wanted. He seemed embarrassed, and he turned away quickly and said no, nothing, and right after that he left."

"And came back in the dead of night and swiped Shakespeare."

"You're joking," Ellen said. "But it *was* queer. Somehow, I don't feel quite as safe as I used to."

"With a cop to take care of you?" Furlow said. Then he looked at his watch. "I'd better go now," he said. "Time to pick up Martha."

He supposed that someday within the next two years, before Martha graduated from nearby Weston Junior College, there might be a crime or an accident sufficiently important to keep him from calling for her twice a week, after her classes. He supposed that some day she might be less baffling to him. Because he was never quite sure whether she admired him and stood in awe, or whether

she was merely pretending but actually making fun of him.

Still, it hardly mattered. She was tall and willowy and as unpredictable as the bounce of a football, and her remarks went from the completely irrelevant to an insight so sharp and true that he often envied it.

She was waiting for him at her usual spot under the elms on the southeast corner of the campus and, as usual, he was exactly sixty seconds late. She climbed into the police cruiser like a queen stepping up the gangway of a battleship, there to review the crew.

"You look pleased about something," she remarked, settling down. "What happened?"

"Got a real mystery today. Somebody swiped the Shakespeare bust from the library, and first off I want to stop in at the *Gazette* and give them the story. Then I have a list of five teenagers who are the most likely ones to pull a stunt like this."

"And if none of them did?" Martha asked.

Furlow grinned and touched his gun belt. "Then," he said, "we have a tough case. All the vast resources of the West Weston police department will be drafted and put to work, including you."

By evening, however, Clyde Furlow had exhausted his list and cleared everybody on it. On Tuesday he read an additional hundred pages of the encyclopedia. On Wednesday the *Gazette* published the Shakespeare story, on Thursday the library was closed, and on Friday the bust was back in the library—minus one ear.

Furlow brought Martha along while he made his investigation.

"They didn't treat Shakespeare very well," Ellen said. "His left ear got chipped off."

Furlow took the bust down from the shelf to which it had been restored and studied the head. "Ear's not chipped," he said. "It was sawed off. You can see the marks."

"But," Ellen said, "who would want a plaster ear?"

"Plaster?" Furlow said, scraping the surface with his thumbnail. "This is hydrocal. Stronger. Doesn't pulverize, although it's almost as absorbent as plaster of Paris."

Ellen was not interested in the techniques of casting. "Who," she said, "would want that ear?"

"More likely," Furlow said, "who would want to destroy it?"

"All right. Who?"

"Let's say that the man who broke in here was your Blackbeard," Furlow said. "Now

suppose he came here to get a certain book, but didn't want anybody to know he was taking it. Therefore, after he walked in here the other day and saw that he was attracting your attention, he beat it."

"He could have stolen the book when my back was turned," Ellen said. "Lots of people do that."

"He didn't know how easy it was," Furlow said. "He probably thought you were merely an ordinary librarian."

"Then why didn't he simply sit down and read whatever he came for?"

"I don't know," Furlow said. "But it looks as if he wanted the book itself. And, being a stranger without a library card, he decided that the simplest way to get hold of the book without anybody knowing who he was, was to sneak in here some time during the weekend. Which is what he did."

"And knocked over my ink in the dark," Ellen said.

"And got it all over his hands, and may even have left his fingerprints, nicely inked. On the ear, for instance. Which would explain why he took the bust along with him, and sliced off the ear before returning the thing."

"But why return it?"

"Because the *Gazette* was making a big fuss over the

stolen bust, and the best way to cut off any further investigation was simply to return the statue."

"Why, Clyde," Martha said, "how clever of you! But where's the book?"

"First, let's find out what the book is. Ellen, is there any way of finding out what's missing from the eight-o-eight area?"

"My shelf list," Ellen said. "Everything on it should either be there on the shelf, or else in the *borrowed* file. You and Martha can check it if you like."

Furlow took the list, scanned it briefly and handed it to Martha. "Read me the titles," he said, "while I see if they're here."

Furlow checked carefully. He didn't expect any books to be missing. None was. More likely, Blackbeard was looking for an item in one of the high school year books. So all Furlow had to do was run his eye along the row, spot the missing year, and then question somebody who'd graduated in that class. Simple enough, except that none of the year books was missing.

He turned away and walked over to a window. For the first time, it occurred to him that he might be involved in something more important than a missing book. West Weston wasn't used to crime, he hadn't been think-

ing in terms of anything serious, but a feeling began to grow in him that he'd barely touched the surface of an iceberg.

Ellen's Mr. Blackbeard had risked breaking into the library twice. Furthermore, he was still here, otherwise he couldn't have returned the bust. So—look for an awkward stranger with a beard, or in case he'd shaved it off, a stranger without a beard. Clyde had that much, at least, to get rolling with.

Martha, calling across the room, interrupted his train of thought. "Clyde, I found the book."

He spun around and said, "What! How'd you find it?"

"I looked for a book with green ink stains smeared all over it. It's called 'My Life in Politics,' by O.K. Jarvis. Who's he?"

Furlow crossed the room, took the book and opened it. "Jarvis?" he said, scanning the blurb. "It says he was a country boy who became a lawyer and amassed a fortune. It calls him glamorous and says he went into politics and built up his own machine and got elected governor."

Clyde Furlow closed the volume. "I remember reading that he quit in the middle of his term when he was accused of Mafia connections and of taking

Mafia money. He went to Italy, where I guess he's still living."

"The Mafia *here*?" Ellen said, shocked. "In West Weston?"

"You're five jumps ahead of me," Furlow said, riffling through the pages and satisfying himself that Blackbeard had deposited no obvious fingerprints. "What bothers me is why, if there's something he wanted to know, he couldn't simply read the book and return it. Or go to Weston or East Weston and look at the book there. Why swipe it and then return it?"

"Maybe there's some kind of notation," Ellen said. "A locker number where somebody left a large sum of money, and Mr. Blackbeard came back to find it."

"And stayed all week long, which he must have done in order to return the bust?" Furlow said. "Hardly. But first, let's see who borrowed that book, and when."

Ellen rummaged through her files and picked out a card. "Hiram Wentworth," she said. "Last October, and he kept it three weeks. Do you know him?"

"Sure. Carpenter, works with Cannon construction. I'll talk to him when he gets home tonight. Meanwhile—remember Sherlock Holmes's famous remark about the barking dog?

The point was that the dog didn't bark."

"What of it?" Martha said.

"The point isn't what's in the book, but what isn't. Suppose, for instance, somebody cut out a page." Carefully, Clyde Furlow ran through the volume and checked the numbering.

"All here," he said. "Nothing missing, except maybe—"

"Except what?" Martha said.

"The pictures. There are supposed to be four plates following page one-twenty and four more after page two-sixteen. Let's see." He bent down, glanced at the list of illustrations, turned to them and then looked up with a slow, satisfied smile.

"Well?" Martha said.

"Plate two's missing. According to index, one side of the page is a picture of O.K. Jarvis and his wife. On the other side is a photograph of the picnic he held to celebrate his election as governor."

"A group picture?" Ellen said. "Maybe it has a picture of one of the Mafia that the police are looking for."

Furlow laughed. "Ellen, for a librarian, you're not only soft-hearted about books, you're romantic."

"Mafia—romantic?" she said.

"Well, you've got quite an imagination. But as a practical, working cop, I'd like to get hold



of another copy of the book and see exactly what that missing picture is."

"I'll phone Weston," Ellen said. "Ralph Oliver probably has a copy."

"Him?" Furlow said. "He's more likely to be the guy who broke in here than someone who's willing to help out."

"But he has no beard," Ellen said coldly.

"Artificial beard," Furlow said, deadpan. "He was disguised, but afraid you'd see through it. That's why he left as soon as you spoke to him."

Ellen grimaced and picked up the phone. A minute or so later

she put it down. "He has the book," she said. "He'll put it aside for you and hold it until you're ready to look at it."

"Now," Furlow said. "I'm going right over. And I'd like this copy, too. What me to sign for it?"

"Take it," Ellen said. "I'll check it out for you."

"Thanks," he replied and, with Martha a step or two behind him, he left the library and went out to the blue-and-white police cruiser.

The Weston library, while not up to city standards, was open daily and had a staff of three with Ralph Oliver as the chief. Furlow had no idea why he disliked Oliver. He was a thin, scabbly man with a high head and small, pale, onion eyes. They looked suspiciously at Furlow as he entered the library.

"Ellen said you wanted a book," Oliver said. "Here it is." He pointed at it on the corner of the desk.

Clyde picked it up and turned to the illustrations following page 120. Plate two was missing.

Clyde showed it to Oliver. "Any idea how that happened? he said.

"Should I?"

"When was it last taken out, and by whom?"

"Look at the list of borrowers

inside the front flap," Oliver said. "Everybody signs out there, so take a look and you'll know as much as I do."

Furlow opened the book. Seven people had taken it out in the five years since the library acquired it. The most recent borrowing was almost two years ago.

Furlow put the volume down. "Do many of your books get vandalized?" he asked sharply.

"If you want to find out," Oliver said, gesturing at the rows and rows of shelves, "just look through them—all of them. It's a free library. I'm not stopping you."

Furlow felt himself flush. "Thanks for the cooperation," he said with cold, stiff irony. He stalked out to Martha and the car.

"Did you find out anything?" she asked.

"Not much. His copy had the same picture missing, so the next step is to locate a copy that's intact. I'll make some phone calls and see what I can find out."

He made them from the small police office in back of the firehouse, and the calls were to various neighborhood libraries. He asked all of them the same question. "Do you have a copy of O.K. Jarvis's 'My Life in Politics?'" When the answer was yes, he asked

whether plate two, following page 120, was in place, and when the book had last been borrowed. Every library within a radius of thirty miles or so reported that plate two was missing and that the book hadn't been borrowed in at least a year. Eventually, when he located a copy with the picture intact, it was 70 miles away.

"I'll send for it," Furlow said. Then, to Martha, "Can you borrow a car and go there?"

"I can't borrow one," Martha said, "but I'm sure Ralph will take me."

"Ralph?"

"Ralph Oliver. He'll be glad to."

"I don't doubt it," Furlow said. He glowered at Martha as she left and shortly afterwards he was on his way to Hi Wentworth's.

The house, a ranch type, was not quite finished. The smell of new wood was strong, and Furlow had to pick his way past pieces of lumber with nails in them, broken slices of wallboard, discarded bits of electric cable and chips of building block. The tired-looking woman who opened the door wiped her hands on her apron and waited as if she expected to be accused of homicide, rape, larceny and maybe treason besides.

Furlow smiled at her. "Is Hi home?" he said.

She nodded and called out towards the back of the house. "Hi? Clyde Furlow's here to see you."

The narrow-faced man with the high forehead had oversized hands and forearms. He spoke rapidly, as if he was racing through a Gilbert and Sullivan patter.

"Hellow Clyde what can I do for you haven't seen you in a long time how are you?"

"Fine. I wanted to check up on a book you borrowed from the library last fall. 'My Life in Politics,' by O.K. Jarvis. Any particular reason you took it out?"

"Had something in about Lenny Mason and I went to school with him. He went west and got into politics and got killed."

"The book was about him?"

"No but he was on O.K. Jarvis's staff and there was a picture of him and I cut it out is that what you came for?"

Furlow scratched his ear. The tirade of words cranked up his own tongue and he figured that if he spoke fast, he wouldn't have any time left to think. So, suppressing his excitement and trying to be laconic, he said, "Yeah, I guess it's one of the things. Got the picture?"

"Lost it somewhere Ruthie

thinks she threw it away by mistake."

"What made you take the book out last October? Why then? Any special reason that made you think of him at that particular time?"

"His mother. She'd left Weston years ago and I read she was sick and came back to Weston around then and she owned that big house in North Woods got lots of money and died a few days ago and Lenny would have got it all."

That was the gist of the information that Clyde gleaned from the 300-words-a-minute torrent. With his head spinning, he returned to the peace and quiet of the police office, where he studied the book. It was easy to find the reference to Lenny Mason, of Weston.

"After my great victory," Jarvis wrote, "I announced that the people had elected me and I was going to thank them as they deserved. I invited all voters to a mammoth picnic at my Hood River estate. I expected a thousand people, but about three thousand came. Food ran short, but I had plenty of liquor.

"The riot, of course, was no fault of mine. I tried to stop it, but before the day was over fourteen people were taken to the hospital for various injuries, there were two gunshot

wounds and one killing, which the police were never able to solve. The victim was Leonard Mason, a personal friend of mine and a member of my staff. To the present day, no motive has been discovered and no clue has ever been found relating to the murder."

Furlow put the book down. Lenny Mason murdered. A group picture taken on the day of his death. Suppose blackbeard was his murderer and was there in the group picture, or that the picture contained a clue to the crime. Suppose—suppose—

When Martha returned about nine, Clyde Furlow was still supposing. She not only had the book, but she had a piece of news besides.

"Ralph," she said, "told me he remembered the man with the black beard. Not well enough to identify, except maybe by voice. But Ralph does remember seeing him cut a picture out of the book and accusing him of vandalism. The man was upset and apologized and left as soon as he could, but it wasn't until after he left that Ralph realized the man had gone off with the picture."

"Why in hell couldn't Ralph have told me?" Furlow demanded angrily. Then, getting hold of himself, he said, "I guess it was my fault, an-

tagonizing him. I have to learn to be patient and never let anything get personal."

Martha, obviously embarrassed by the admission, spoke quickly. "Let's look at the book," she said and opened it to page 120 and turned to plate two.

It showed O.K. Jarvis and his staff. The caption identified Leonard Mason as the man sitting third from the left. Behind the group a man was unloading beer barrels from a truck. Also in the background were two couples who were laughing and a man eating a sandwich. Even under a magnifying glass, however, the features of the background figures were barely identifiable.

"What do you make of it?" Martha asked.

"Read this first," Furlow said, and found the passage about Lenny Mason's death at the picnic.

When she'd finished reading, she looked up at him questioningly.

"Beginning to shape up, isn't it?" he said. "Let's say Blackbeard is there in that picture. He's the one eating a sandwich or unloading a truck or laughing with his girl, and that's why he doesn't want anybody to see that photograph. It puts him right at the scene of the crime."

"But why worry about the picture now? Why not a few years ago?"

"Because he's in this area now, and a few years ago he wasn't. Remember—Ralph caught him six months ago, which was when he probably cut out all the other pictures, except the one in the Ellen's library. And that one, he tended to last week."

"But still—why now?"

"Because something's going to happen around now. I don't know what, but let's go look for Blackbeard and ask him."

"What a nice idea," Martha said sweetly. "Where shall we look?"

"How about a few bars over in Weston? Let me get out of this uniform first, and—and ask Oliver to come with us, will you? He might recognize the voice."

Oliver was willing, although he accepted Furlow's apology sullenly and for Martha's sake only. As for Martha, she chattered all the way to Weston and acted as if Furlow and Oliver were bosom friends and it was a privilege to be with them.

The cool April air, the first clear evening of the month, had brought crowds of people to Weston. The streets and the bars were jammed, and Furlow and Martha filed into Joe's Singles Bar, elbowed their way

to the rear of the room, circled, lingered and finally turned around and left. Furlow saw nothing, Oliver heard nothing, and Martha refused three drink offers and one outright proposition, and was flattered.

At the Canopy there was standing room only, and the trio reconnoitered without bothering to order a drink. After a few minutes, Furlow shook his head.

"Not here," he said. "Let's try the Ship's Bar."

There, they squeezed inside and were lucky enough to find a small table that gave them a view of the entire room. Furlow and Oliver sipped beers, while Martha toyed with a glass of ginger ale. Presently Furlow pointed to a husky man with a round face and puffed out cheeks. His hair was dark and thickish.

"Him," Furlow said. "I'm going over there. Oliver, walk by in a couple of minutes, and if you recognize the voice, nod and keep on going. Martha, if I scratch my ear, call the state troopers and tell them to come here and assist me in making an arrest. It won't take them more than five minutes or so to get here."

"You think that's Blackbeard?" Martha said excitedly. "Sitting with the woman in orange-and-black slacks?"

"Hope so," Furlow said. He stood up and walked over to the husky man's table. "Mind if I sit down?" he said casually and pulled up a chair before the husky man could object.

"My name's Furlow," he said. "I don't think I've seen you around."

"How could you? I just got here."

"A stranger?"

"Hardly! I came from here originally, but I've been away for quite a while, in California. Why so interested?"

"I'm trying to place you," Furlow said, glancing up and watching Oliver approach. "I was wondering what your name was."

"Mason. I'm Jim Mason, and what do you want?"

Oliver walked by, hesitated long enough to hear Mason's voice, then nodded and went on.

Clyde Furlow answered Mason's question. "I knew your brother Lenny. What happened to him?"

"How could I know?" Mason said. "Hadn't seen him or heard of him in years. When I got here a few days ago, they told me Lenny was dead. Poor guy!"

"Lenny was the favorite son," the woman said, "but six months ago Jim came to see his mother and charmed her into a reconciliation. Didn't you, Jim?"

"Changed her will?" Furlow aid innocently.

The woman said, "Yes," and Jason snapped at her. Stupid—can't you ever shut p?"

Furlow scratched his ear and atched Martha get up and ave her table. "I'd like to tell ou a story," he said. "It's about vo brothers, the good brother nd the bad brother. The good rother was due to inherit all ie money in the family, so the ad brother killed him.

"He did it at a big picnic here everybody got drunk and nings got out of hand and ere was practically no way of roving the bad brother had ven been anywhere near the icnic, not even in the same state, except that somebody ook a picture. By accident, the ad brother happened to be somewhere in the background. Vorse luck, the picture was reproduced in a book."

"What are you driving at?" Jason demanded furiously.

"Just telling a story," Furlow aid. "Now six months ago the ad brother came back here nd got his mother to change er will, in his favor. He knew hat the will would be contested, people would investigate, would be suspicious of the ood brother's death, would find he Jarvis book and the picture nd would get hold of the nega-

tive and have it enlarged—which would identify the bad brother as having been right there at the scene of the crime."

"Ridiculous!" Mason said. "What's it got to do with me?"

"You ran into some bad luck," Furlow said. "In one library you were caught cutting that picture out of a book and the librarian just a few minutes ago identified you. Another library you had to break into, you spilt some ink and got your fingerprint on the ear of a plaster bust, so you took it and then got scared and went and returned it. So it all adds up."

"You make me laugh," Mason said. "Who in hell are you?"

"Officer Furlow, West Weston police."

"A small town cop? So what are you going to do—arrest me?"

Furlow turned around and saw the pair of troopers coming in. "No," he said. "They are."

Later on, Furlow came back and Martha asked the question.

"How did you know him?"

"He kept bringing his hand up to his face without quite touching it and then dropping his hand. Obviously, he kept wanting to stroke his beard, only the beard wasn't there. So I went and spoke to him."

Martha gave Furlow a long, searching glance, and this time there was no doubt about her look—definitely admiration.



WHEN WE'D ORDERED breakfast in the Koffee Klatsch, Julie Barton blew damp blonde bangs away from her forehead. "Another stinking hot day," she said. "Even for New Mexico in the middle of July it's hot. Why doesn't Sheriff Wainwright buy you a cruiser with air conditioning?"

"Citizens like to see us deputies sweat for our money," told her.

Carmen Morales brought my ham and eggs as well as Julie's sweet roll. The Koffee Klatsch is directly across Main Street Alamoro, from the First National Bank. It was ten minutes until nine by the bank's clock 103° by its thermometer. Julie was a cashier in the bank.

DEATH RIDE

by M. G. OGAN

The Sheriff ordered Deputy Stirling off the case after his fiancee was gunned down. So Stirling took off after the killers on his own initiative.

Saturday afternoon she was to be Mrs. Brand Stirling. Next week we'd be having breakfast in our own home, a modest frame house on a small ranch three miles north of town.

"Is the bank's air conditioner fixed yet?" I asked Julie.

"No, damn it! Mr. Sanford says they'll be coming today, and I surely hope so. We have to get out statements and it's a sweatbox over there. Even customers with past-due loans have begun to complain."

"Bless the day you can quit," I said.

"Amen to that!" Julie dazzled me with one of her rare smiles. "Until they do something about your salary, however, and until our house and ranch are paid for, we need two paychecks. But we've been over all that."

"Two dozen times. Groves is

retiring next fall." Jim Groves is Sheriff Wainright's chief deputy. "Maybe you can kiss the bank good-bye. I'm in line to get his job."

Julie reached across the table to pat my hand. "Congratulations, Brand," she said, "but we're still going to need . . ." Julie glanced past me across the street. "Why, it's Mr. Sanford! He never comes in before nine thirty."

A spruce little man with iron-gray hair, Miles Sanford was the bank's president. I turned my head to see him get out of his Buick, a key ring in his hand. Three men in white coveralls were getting out of a white panel truck that had coasted to a stop directly behind the black Buick.

Julie nibbled her sweet roll and took a quick sip of coffee.

It was one minute until nine.

"Looks as if the air conditioning repairmen finally made it," she said, getting up. She brushed a quick kiss on my ear. "Duty calls. I have to run, Brand. See you this afternoon."

Julie was out of the Koffee Klatsch and crossing the street, skirt swinging to the lilt of her slender hips.

It was nine o'clock.

Julie gave Mr. Sanford and the three men a cheerful wave as she crossed. One of the men crowded around him was tall and thin, with long sideburns. Another was heavy set and paunchy. The third man was short, wiry and had a hawk-like face. His coveralls were too large for him. He'd had to roll the pants legs and sleeves.

When Julie waved, Mr. Sanford made a curious pushing gesture in her direction with his free hand, as if warning her to go back. The tall man spoke to him. Still the import of the tableau there at the bank's front door didn't sink in.

Mr. Sanford had the door open, finally. The three men followed him and Julie into the bank.

The man in the oversize coveralls stopped just inside the bank's front door.

I turned back to finish my breakfast; then got a galvanic jolt! The white panel truck was

new but unmarked and there was no lettering on those white coveralls. Repairmen? Just maybe.

I knocked over my chair getting up, bumping Carmen.

"Hey, man, what gives?" she asked.

"I don't know."

When I brushed through the Koffee Klatsch door I quickly found out. The lookout stepped outside the bank, leveling an M14 at me from the hip. I dropped behind my parked cruiser.

He thumbed the weapon on automatic and cut loose a full banana clip.

Thirty shattering explosions ripped apart the hot morning silence of Alamoro.

The windows of the cruiser shattered as he raked it. Two tires exploded. Powdered glass from holes stitched in the Koffee Klatsch window showered me.

Crouching behind the car, I waited for the sound of a fresh clip being shoved home. When I heard it, I returned his fire over the hood of the cruiser, catching him before he could shoot the bolt and lever the first round into the firing chamber.

I'd placed all three shots from my .44 Magnum in his belly and chest, slamming him back through the bank doorway be-

fore he dropped the M14, to jackknife forward, hands digging at his belly.

The sudden silence was punctuated with a muffled shot inside the bank. Julie? Miles Sanford? *Let it be him!* I prayed.

My prayer wasn't answered. Sanford was hurried out of the bank. The tall man had a Colt .45 muzzle at the back of his neck.

"Brand, don't shoot!" Sanford's face was a waxy mask of terror. His voice broke.

The heavy-set man had me covered with a pistol while the trio sidled toward the panel truck.

Helpless, I ducked behind my cruiser. There was no chance to wing either of the men without getting Sanford killed. My only satisfaction was that they were out of the bank empty-handed except for their weapons. They hadn't been inside long enough to loot the vault.

Tires shrieking, the two men, with Sanford sandwiched between them, barreled out of town, going north toward the Sangre de Cristo mountains. People coming out of stores along Main prevented me from shooting at the panel truck's tires or gas tank.

Before racing to the bank I took a quick look around the Koffee Klatsch. No one inside

had been hit. I paused just long enough to make sure I'd killed the lookout man, then tried to find Julie in the bank's dim interior.

She was on her hands and knees, about ten feet from me, her head hanging but trying to crawl.

"Julie!"

She raised her shock-contorted face, saw me, tried to speak. Instead of words, blood gushed from her gaping mouth.

Slumping to the floor, spread-eagled face down, Julie's body gave a convulsive start, then lay still. She was dead when I reached her.

"Julie!" Sinking to my knees I gathered her limp body to me.

I could feel her warm blood soaking my shirt. Julie had been shot in the back at such close range that there were powder burns on her pink dress.

A siren whimpered in the distance. People were gathering at the door of the bank, staring down at the man I'd killed, peering in at me as I held Julie's body in my arms.

Elbowing people aside, Carmen stepped over the dead man and came into the bank. "Mother of God!" she said, when her eyes adjusted to the bank's dim interior. "Is she...?"

"Yes, she's dead, Carmen."

Carmen's olive-skinned face was pinched. "She didn't finish her roll and coffee."

I eased Julie to the floor. Stripping off my blood-soaked shirt, I folded it into a pillow for Julie's head.

When I was standing, Carmen tugged at my arm. "Come out of here." Her tone of voice was nearly scolding. "You can't help Julie, Brand."

The people outside the bank stepped aside to let Carmen and me through. I knew all of them by their first names but death made us strangers.

Inside the now-empty Koffee Klatsch, Carmen pushed me toward a chair. "Sit down." On her way to the kitchen she whisked Julie's coffee cup and the plate with her sweet roll on it off the table we'd shared a few minutes ago.

By the bank clock it was ten past nine.

"Drink." Carmen was back and thrust a pint bottle into my hands.

I needed both of them to lift it to my lips. Tequila burned a fiery path down my throat to explode in my stomach.

Jim Groves' thin and stoop-shouldered figure was outlined against the bright sunshine outside as he stood in the Koffee Klatsch doorway.

"You all right?" Jim stared at the bloodstains on my white

T-shirt. "Your cruiser sure got shot to hell."

"I wasn't scratched," I told Jim, "but the bastards killed Julie."

Pain made his gaunt face seem to shrink. "Oh, God!"

Jim turned on his heel to cross the street and follow Sheriff Wainwright into the bank. I gulped down another drink before handing the bottle back to Carmen.

"Why Julie Barton?" Carmen said. "Why did it have to be her?"

"MAYBE SHE recognized one of the men," Sheriff Wainwright said, speaking with a soft drawl.

It was evening. We were alone in the living room of the house that would never be Julie's.

"Then again," Sheriff Wainwright went on, "a trigger finger could have twitched when their lookout cut loose his M14."

"However it happened," I said, "Julie is just as dead."

Sheriff Wainwright nodded gravely, as if I'd said something profound. "So are Miles Sanford and his wife."

Three miles north of town we'd found the panel truck abandoned with Sanford's body stuffed inside it. He'd been shot through the back of the head.

At the Sanford home they'd bound and gagged Amelia Sanford before dumping her in a closet. She'd died from a heart attack.

"The God-damned violent bastards!" Sheriff Wainwright's palm slapped the arm of his chair. "Three people dead, and for nothing."

"When we close in on those two, I hope they want to shoot it out," I said. I'd worked in the field all day, running down fruitless leads. "What do we have on the dead man?"

"Joey Harper, thirty one, hometown Pueblo, Colorado. A long record but mostly minor stuff. The Pueblo police are checking him out. The F.B.I. wants you to run through their mug book tomorrow. They think you can finger the hard-case pros who tried to pull this job."

"I don't know. I'll try."

"Yeah." Sheriff Wainwright pushed his stocky body up out of the chair. "When you've done that tomorrow I want you off this investigation, Brand. Go somewhere and stay drunk until the funeral."

"Why are you pulling me, damn it?"

"You've been a man wading through a nightmare today," he said. "You're emotionally involved. That ain't good."

"I want those two dead.

"When the F.B.I. is finished with you, get out of Alamoro, Brand."

"That sounds like an order." Sheriff Wainwright nodded. "That's exactly what it is."

I followed him out onto the front porch.

"I don't understand why our roadblocks didn't catch them," he said. "It's a twenty mile straight shot north along the Sangre de Cristo range with no side roads. The state police moved fast this time. The road was blocked only a few minutes after their escape. South of town, too, in case they doubled back." He shook his head wearily. "I just don't understand it."

When Sheriff Wainwright had driven away toward town, I went to the kitchen. I took down an unopened bottle of whisky from the shelf. I stared at it a long time before smashing it in the sink.

Julie didn't like whisky.

Bone-tired but knowing I couldn't sleep yet, I stretched out on the living room couch to stare up at the moonlight-dappled ceiling. I didn't dare close my eyes. The vision of Julie sprawled in a widening puddle of her own blood was still there behind my eyelids. I wondered if it would ever go away.

I'd moved through the day like a brainless automaton, but

now my mind began to work. We'd assumed they'd had a switch car stashed near where they'd abandoned the panel truck. But what if they hadn't? We hadn't yet found any trace of one.

There were no roads up into the bleak and barren Sangre de Cristo mountains, but there were trails. Men on horseback could make it to a mountain camp and wait there for the heat to die down. When it was safe, they could ride out of the mountains to Trinidad, Colorado, posing as hunters or prospectors.

I sat on the edge of the couch, hands clasped between my knees. Moonlight flooded through the bare windows for which Julie had been making curtains. I couldn't stay here with my grief. It was closing in on me.

Jesus Gomez is part Apache and the best tracker I've ever known, besides knowing the Sangre de Cristos like the palm of his hand. To play out my hunch I needed Jesus, but there was a problem. Jesus was a wanted man. He'd stabbed a drunk Anglo in a brawl two weeks ago.

Jesus had dropped out of sight before we could pick him up for assault with a deadly weapon. For all I knew, he could have slipped over the



border. That was the opinion of Sheriff Wainwright.

I thought not. The Spanish-speaking community of Alamoro was on Jesus' side, claiming the Anglo cowhand had picked the fight. I suspected he'd submerged. I knew who could tell me.

José Herrero, a fat and grimy character, owns the Estrellita Cantina, a dim saloon in Spanish Town. So-called Spanish Town is mainly a collection of huts and rickety house trailers along the highway a mile south of Alamoro. José is unofficial mayor of that crime and vice-ridden area.

José is also a very tough hombre. He would know where Jesus was hiding out near Alamoro, or if he'd gone to Mexico. Sheriff's deputies are as welcome as sheep-killing dogs in Spanish Town.

Getting information from José would be harder than squeezing blood from a rock. Mine was a faint lead, and I knew it, but any action that might put me on the trail of Julie's killers was better than sitting in the empty house or going off to get drunk.

José had only half a dozen customers when I entered the cantina, its walls decorated with bull fight posters. Four were Chicanos—two were migrant workers with whisker-stubbled cheeks.

José glanced up when I came in, hostile button-black eyes probing my face, but he continued swiping at the battered bar with a damp, dirty cloth.

Their eyes on me, José's customers drifted down to huddle at the end of the bar. I was out of uniform and carried no weapon, but something in my face told them this wasn't a social call.

"A quiet talk, José."

José jerked a thumb over his shoulder. I followed him into the small kitchen behind the bar and shut the door behind us. "If you know," I said,

"you're going to tell me where to find Jesus Gomez."

José's hard-eyed stare didn't flicker. He picked up a butcher knife, testing the razor-sharp edge with a callused thumb. He also moved so there was a small kitchen table between us.

"We both know there's a warrant out for his arrest," I told him, "but I won't slap him with it. I do need his help."

José shrugged his fleshy shoulders. "Why you come to me, Anglo? Always it is to me." His voice is deep and hoarse. "No badge tonight, no big gun, no uniform."

"Right," I said. "Mine is personal business with Jesus. Stop playing with the damned knife. If I have to take it I just might break your arm."

José laid the knife on the table in front of him. "Personal business," he mused. "Today your woman was killed. Animals! To kill a woman like that? Scum!"

"Jesus, where is he?"

José considered my question, chewing at his lower lip. He stared back at me across the table. "Personal business," he said again. "All right, for that I take your word, Anglo. Go home. If Jesus want to see you, he come to your ranch. It is the best I can do."

"I'll be back here if he doesn't show up tonight," I told José. I

reached for the knife and threw it past José's right ear. It stuck in the wall behind him, quivering, but the man hadn't flinched. "Damn it, José. Tell Jesus I need him."

"I will do so." José said it with dignity I didn't know he had in him. "About your woman, I am sad."

It was ten past midnight when I heard a light rap on my front door. Jesus Gomez was just a shadow on my dark front porch when I opened the door. Jesus is a small but heavily-built man with a brush of black hair. Knife in hand, he stepped back to the head of the porch steps.

"What is this 'personal business', Amigo?" Jesus speaks softly, almost whispering. "State it now I'm here. I'm waiting."

"I want you to track for me. The moon is gone but we can saddle up at daybreak. I have a gelding and a mare back in the barn."

Jesus slid past me and into the dark living room. I closed the door but didn't turn on a light. Jesus settled in the chair Sheriff Wainwright had used. "You think the men who killed your woman have gone into the Sangre de Cristos." It wasn't a question. "They are dangerous game to track, Amigo. Maybe we find them. What then?"

"What then if it was your woman they'd killed?" I said.

"Their hearts," Jesus said softly. "I would cut them out."

"I've been pulled off the investigation," I warned him.

"No matter," Jesus said. "Now we sleep?"

"Yes. You take the couch here."

"No. This chair, she's comfortable." He rested his head against the back. "Will it be a favor for a favor, Amigo?"

"I'll do the best I can to get charges against you dropped."

"You're a man who keeps his word."

"Thanks, Jesus."

There was a soft snore from the direction of the chair, so I doubt he heard me.

AT THE SITE where we'd found the panel truck that morning we unloaded the saddled horses from the trailer behind my pick-up. The sun was behind the bald peaks of the Sangre de Cristos. It was going to be another blistering day.

Dark trousers were stuffed into the knee-high, moccasin boots Jesus wore, his shirt was purple, a high-crowned, undented hat rode squarely on his head. The wicked Bowie knife was in a shabby leather sheath at his belt.

I'd furnished the blanket rolls, Remington saddle guns,

full canteens of water and the grub loaded on the horses. Jesus would ride Julie's mare, a black horse she'd named Obsidian. The bay gelding, Toby, would be my mount.

Raising his seamy face, Jesus sniffed at the still morning air. "Horse dung, not fresh." Jesus pointed east, toward the mountains. On foot I scrambled up the steep bank on that side of the road, behind Jesus. In a space clear of cactus and mesquite, about a hundred yards from the road, we found where horses had stood.

Jesus picked up a handful of horse dung and crumpled it in his brown hand. When he sniffed at it, Jesus' eyes met mine. "No later than yesterday morning, Amigo—two men and three horses were here."

"I killed the man who would have ridden that third horse at the bank." Excitement pulsed inside of me. "Can you track them?"

Jesus grimaced. I guessed it was the best smile his stolid face could manage. "Two white men with three horses? So easy as tracking an elephant." He squinted at the Sangre de Cristos. "Up there I know a box canyon with a spring. There is a Jeep track from Trinidad."

He squatted on his heels, staring at the muddled horse and man tracks. "If they are in

the Sangre de Cristos, that's where they should be."

"Let's go," I said.

Jesus stroked his chin with one hand, eyes still studying the ground. "No posse," he said, and nodded approval. "These are only white men, but they have killed, perhaps before." Jesus stood up, hands kneading his back muscles. "They will be watching their back trail." With thumbs and fingers he circled his eyes, added, "This canyon—when we are sure that is where they have gone—we can reach another way."

"How long will it take us?"

"Sundown—maybe later." He pointed to one pair of boot tracks. "This man is tall, maybe thin. See the length of his stride. This other"—he pointed to another pair of boot tracks—"is shorter, maybe heavy. Notice he walks on his heels."

"You've described the men we're after."

"*Bueno.*" Jesus swung up into his saddle.

I followed him down into a deep, winding canyon.

At noon, as we emerged from the canyon to a dusty plateau, Jesus raised his hand. "They stopped here, *Amigo.*"

He swung down off Obsidian. A hand on the mare's neck eased her restless snorting. Jesus disappeared into a heavy

clump of mesquite. I could hear him thrashing around in there. It was no longer than five minutes before he emerged from the clump. He tossed me a wad of dirt-soiled white cloth.

I unfolded it to find myself staring down at a pair of white coveralls.

"They wore those?" he asked.

"They sure as hell did." I told him.

Jesus reached for his canteen and I heaved a sigh of relief. Neither of us had sipped water since this morning. My mouth and throat were powderhouse dry, but I was damned if I'd drink before Jesus did.

Before he lifted the canteen to his lips, Jesus poured water into the palm of his hand to wet the mare's muzzle. "No water between here and the way we reach the canyon," he said. "We don't want to kill these fine horses to drink from their bellies. I am only half Apache."

I took his hint and watered my horse before I drank.

We built a small greasewood fire to boil coffee. Only a faint trickle of white smoke rose from the embers. We were getting deep into the mountains now. "What if they sight our smoke?" I asked.

"If they do, who cares?" Jesus shrugged.

"We should, damn it!" I was itchy with trail dust and still

craving water. "We could get bushwacked."

Jesus got up and slashed green cactus to lay on the embers. Smoke gushed up into the sky. "We leave their trail here," he said. "If they see our smoke, they wonder."

"And begin to sweat. Yet they could make a run for Trinidad."

Jesus shook his head. "A puff of smoke in the sky, what is that? A prospector? Perhaps some crazy Indian?" A smile-grimace twisted his features. "*Quien sabe?*"

This was a game to Jesus. I closed my eyes. Julie dead in her own blood was still painted on my eyelids.

"These men, *Amigo*," Jesus said. "You don't want to take them alive. Now you think like a good Apache."

"But not like a deputy sheriff." My voice was wry.

"It was your woman they killed. The going now becomes hard."

Hard going? From the plateau we crowded our horses into a maze of arroyos and steep-walled canyons. We sweltered in the blazing afternoon sun. The horses tired, and for much of the distance we were on foot, leading them. There was no sign of a trail all afternoon, not even a game trail.

Before the sun began setting

even Jesus was tired enough to stumble once or twice. We were leading our horses up a steep slope toward a narrow gap between two of the bald Sangre de Cristo peaks. The mountains were bathed blood-red by the setting sun. It was my guess we'd reach the pass just as the sun disappeared over the western horizon.

"How much further?" I asked when we paused a moment to rest.

There's only a few minutes of dusk after the sun sets on New Mexico. Stumbling around in the Sangre de Cristos at night is a good way to break your neck. I doubted even Jesus Gomez had cat eyes.

"Through the pass, we wait for the moon," he said. "Five, maybe six miles." Jesus reached for a twig to draw in the dust. "Here is the pass." He drew two straight lines. To the right he drew a U facing west. "There is the canyon." Jesus tapped the closed end of the U. "Down this wall we come. Very steep. One slip, we fall into their camp by the spring."

I thought about what he'd told me. "On that canyon wall, in the moonlight, won't we be sitting ducks on a pond if they spot us?"

"They are white men." Jesus spoke with disdain. He touched the open end of the U. "They

will expect us to come in this way."

"Just maybe you're right," I said.

Jesus rose from his crouch, tossing away the twig. "If I'm not, *Amigo*, we're both dead men."

"Let's keep this straight," I told him. "I asked you to track for me, that's all. I'll take over when we run them down. Keep your life off the line."

Jesus' was a careless shrug. "Have it as you say."

"Let's move out."

WE'D LEFT our horses a mile behind us, taking our saddle guns. Strapped around my waist was the .44. Jesus had his knife. Ahead of us about a hundred yards was the lip of the wall at the deadened of the canyon.

"We crawl from here," Jesus whispered. "No noise."

Cradling my Remington, I wriggled along behind him on elbows and knees. It was rough going over jagged pebbles and rocks. Each move forward had to be carefully planned. Sound travels far in the cool and quiet New Mexican night. A dislodged pebble or rock rolling down a slope could give us away.

Once or twice I paused to look behind us, but saw nothing. Yet I couldn't rid myself

of the curious feeling we were being watched.

Nerves and exhaustion, I told myself.

Finally we could peer over the edge of the cliff. It wasn't a sheer drop of about two hundred feet to the flat floor of the canyon, but it was very steep. Mesquite poked out of cracks in the wall of rock. At the foot of it was a Talus slope of gravel and jagged boulders.

Beyond the slope two men, their backs to us, hunkered behind a small fire. There was a Jeep down there and three restless horses huddled together.

Two rifles were slanted against a rock, within easy reach of both men, and they'd strapped on sidearms. In the moonlight and from above it was difficult to identify them positively, but a few words of their conversation drifted up to us.

"... a stinking mess, Jake, and no money."

"The God-damned kid's fault . . . your idea we use him."

"He got paid in full."

Jesus pointed off to our left and moved back. "That way," he whispered—then froze, staring behind us.

I say *froze*. Actually, for a split second, Jesus was startled. Then from a crouch, Jesus sprang, moonlight glittering on his knife.

I felt as if my left shoulder had been slugged with a sledge-hammer, simultaneously a rifle shot deafened me.

Grabbing at my shoulder, I rolled over and sat up. Jesus' right elbow jerked toward me as he pulled the knife from the man's belly. As the man staggered back, the rifle fell on the stony ground. Falling to his knees, head down, his arms clasped his belly.

Jesus grabbed the man's hair, jerked his head up, then stabbed him in the throat.

I was on my knees, trying to get up, when the man pitched headlong toward Jesus and Jesus took a quick step backwards. When he did so, Jesus bumped me over the edge.

I was sliding, grabbing with my right hand for anything to break my fall; my left arm was useless. Face to the cliff, I tore at mesquite bushes. None could hold my weight, but uprooting one after another slowed me enough to grab and hold onto a ledge of rock.

I thrashed my legs, kicked the toe of one boot in a crack, and there I was, stunned but no longer sliding down the face of the cliff.

Bullets showered me with rock crumbs as the two men below opened up, their rifle shots echoing back and forth in the narrow canyon until it sounded

as if at least a dozen men were shooting at me.

I looked down. I was halfway to the bottom. Muzzle flashes above me added to the racket. Jesus was pumping away with our saddle guns.

I freed my boot, let go the ledge; slid the rest of the way to the bottom. After a jolt that jarred my teeth I sprawled behind a boulder, jerking my .44 from its holster.

The men had taken cover behind rocks at the bottom of the Talus.

The shot echos died.

Quiet as the grave, I thought. My left arm felt wooden but it was too soon for any pain.

We had a standoff.

"Give it up," one of the men shouted up to Jesus. "We got your partner."

Jesus answered with three quick shots.

It was no longer a standoff. They thought they'd shot me off the cliff. Their attention was focused on Jesus.

I began inching along the Talus, as silently as I could.

Jesus fired again. Both men answered his fire this time. While the shots echoed I slid down the Talus.

When I rolled over, I found I was slightly behind the men crouched behind the rocks. I could only see their shadows because moonlight was nearly



gone. I was dizzy and ready to black out. Blood soaked the left sleeve of my shirt.

They were about thirty yards from me. I had six rounds. If the men straightened to use their weapons, they'd make fair targets. I prayed for Jesus to open up again. Man-shadows are hard to hit. Jesus didn't oblige.

Within a minute or two I'd pass out.

Somehow I managed to make it to my feet. "Over here, you bastards."

I dropped to my knees.

The man closest to me half-rose, swinging his rifle toward me, and I fired twice. My slugs slammed him over on his back.

His partner got off one shot that screamed by my ear before I emptied my .44. He straightened up, did a crazy dance, pitched forward, face down.

Walking as if I was dead drunk, I reached the bodies, kicked away their weapons, then fainted.

As I passed out I thought I heard the clear, bubbling sound of Julie's laughter. Maybe I was dead and didn't yet know it.

I was out a long time because it was getting light when I came to. I was stretched on a bedroll, my shoulder bandaged, my arm in a sling.

Men were moving around but I could only make out Sheriff Wainwright's face staring down at me. "Welcome back, Brand," he said in a dry voice. "I thought I ordered you off this investigation."

"How did you get here?"

"By Jeep from Trinidad. We saw your truck and trailer parked where we'd found the panel. It wasn't hard to figure you were on a scent."

I sat up and waited for my

head to clear. "Why come in from Trinidad?" I asked.

"With Jesus Gomez hiding out, we couldn't find a tracker. We'll find that rascal and throw the book at him. Oh, yes, we found the Indian." Sheriff Wainwright pointed up the cliff. "Damn, you're handy with a knife."

"Sheriff . . ." I began; then stopped.

"We also brought in your horse. He's over there."

Jesus was scampering out of the Sangre de Cristos on Obsidian. If he went to trial before an Anglo jury, the fact he'd saved my life wouldn't count as much as his efficiency with a knife.

"You sure did a hell of a job up here," Sheriff Wainwright said in an admiring voice. "I owe you something, Brand. What will it be?"

"Get the charges against Jesus Gomez quashed," I said. "He told me where they might be hiding. A favor for a favor."

Sheriff Wainwright's was a puzzled frown, but he said, "Well, all right, I guess I asked for it. By the way, what did you do with your knife? It ain't in the Indian's body."

"I must have lost it," I said.

FINAL GAMBLE



The delivery looked simple enough—but it detonated a hot powder train of murder.

**by JEFFREY M.
WALLMANN**

"YOU'RE SUPPOSED to be on the Bucket by now," Myrna said. She stood in the slanting light coming through Silvestri's bedroom window, glancing behind her while adjusting her skirt. "It's after four, and you know how Eric hates to be kept waiting."

"To hell with Eric." Silvestri sat on the edge of his bed, a thin, angular man of sinew and wire, his age evident in the creases of tanned skin and the grayness of once sable hair. He sat hunched forward, arms on legs, slowly sharpening the blade of a stiletto, making small concentric whorls on the oily carborundum stone. "He thinks he owns me. He'd like to, but he doesn't."

"You always say that but you always go. Don't be tiresome."

Silvestri looked up at Myrna—at her slender body and cutesy face—at overly large eyes, round and deep-set like puddles of rainwater and as shallow and reflective. There'd been a time when Silvestri had thought he could understand her through those eyes, but now he knew that to be a delusion.

He shifted his gaze, letting her comment pass as he had so many of her others, and stared with faded eyes at his boney toes and ankles, hairless from years of scuba diving.

"You're sure Eric didn't tell you what kind of job this was?" Silvestri asked.

"Since when does he talk things over with *me*? He wouldn't even let me know if he ever found out about us."

"Watch out that he doesn't, Myrna. He's the jealous type."

"Possessive, not jealous." She picked up her purse and walked casually to the door, combing her fingers through her long brown hair. "I'm property to him, Jim, like his boat. It's you who'd better be careful." She paused with door partly open, turning to smile at him in certain smugness. "After all, you only work for him."

Silvestri ran his thumb along the edge of his knife, hearing high heels clicking on the stairs leading to the street. When he

flipped the blade, it stuck effortlessly in the soft, dry-rotted walls . . .

Silvestri reached the Bucket shortly before four-thirty, walking through the brilliant Texas heat as if ignoring it, down to the docks lining the bay just south of Corpus Christi proper. The Bucket had been optimistically christened *Buccaneer*, but had earned her more apt nickname after her first season at charter fishing.

She was some forty feet, a shopworn matron, broad of beam, cut high at bow and stern, her klinker-built flesh of heavy planks powdered a dirty white and trimmed a faded blue.

She'd carried many names before, but her past was faint memory now, and this was probably the last berth she'd earn. The Bucket she'd stay until either she or her master, Eric Raude, went down for good.

The boat creaked wearily as Silvestri boarded, riding high and flushing her bilge into the harbor like the vulgar old bawd she was. Silvestri made his way along the narrow deck space that flanked the center cabin, entered the bridge and went below.

The cabin was Spartan, consisting of four bunks—the lower two permanent, the uppers

folded flat against the bulkheads—a bolted-down table, chairs which could be hooked to eyelets in the cabin sole in case of bad weather, and mahogany paneled lockers. A passageway led to the forward hold, the chain-locker and a cuddy-sized galley. Aft lay the head, another hold, tanks and the engine room.

Sitting at the table were Two men. One was Raude, drinking beer, uncomfortably fat and glistening with sweat, overflowing a tight vest and whipcord pants. He was moodily contemplating the man across from him—a white-haired ferret nattily pressed of suit and glossy of shoe, reeking of lavender water and acting as if he were alone, as if Raude were a bad habit given up decades before.

"You're late," Raude said, squinting at Silvestri.

Silvestri went into the galley, returned with a beer and sat down.

Raude said, "Didn't my wife tell you what time to be here?"

"She told me. What do you want?"

"It's what Mr. Jamison here wants. He wants to hire us."

"Maybe." Jamison's voice was as composed as his manner.

"Maybe," Raude echoed disgustedly. "We've been maybeing until you arrived, Jim, since it hinges on how well you

scuba. I've been telling him you know what you're doing, but he doesn't believe me."

"*You* know, but how do *I*?" Jamison leaned toward Silvestri. "For example, I know you run a cut-rate fishing charter with Raude, when you two aren't smuggling parrots in from Mexico. Quite a comedown from Vegas for you, isn't it, Silvestri—fish and birds?"

Silvestri lowered his beer, sensing more was to come.

"I know your fingers were broken, smashed for your part in that gambling swindle there in sixty-five. I know they haven't healed perfectly and you'll never deal cards the way you used to, even if the syndicates would allow you a job. I know your partner didn't get off as lucky as you and nobody's seen him since. A pity! I also know how close you came to succeeding."

"That, too," Silvestri said softly. "What else?"

"Does it matter? What I don't know is how well you swim."

"I was in underwater demolition during Korea," Silvestri replied after a pause. "When I was discharged, I worked a while as a so-called expert, then did some pearl diving in the Gulf of Cortez."

"Used to, all 'used to.' What about now?"

"I keep wet when I can, and

my equipment is still in good shape. But suppose you say what you want, and I'll tell you if I can do it."

The older man drummed fingers on the table, his long nails making staccato sounds like a secretary typing. "Very well. I need a package delivered to Ciudad Madero. You know where it is?"

"On the Mexican coast near Tampico, about three hundred and sixty-seventy nautical miles from here. What's in the package?"

"That's not your concern," said Jamison.

"I'm *making* it mine. You obviously have in mind that I swim ashore with it, and my container is small, and I can't take much weight."

"Three pounds and the size of a common brick. You can take that."

"It'd be a snap, Jim," Raude said, daubing his lips with a wadded handkerchief. "I could swing within a mile or so and a man could be waiting on the beach. The water's warm and not too choppy."

"What's in it?" Silvestri asked again, ignoring Raude. "I like knowing what's being strapped on me by a man I've never met before."

"Not narcotics, if that bothers you," Jamison said testily. "You don't spend time and money



smuggling narcotics *into* Mexico."

Silvestri shook his head. "It's for your welfare, too. If I run into trouble, I'll know better how to handle things."

Jamison sighed. "You'll have to take my word for it, then. The package must stay sealed. It's a concentrate of vitamin B-twelve."

Raude jerked, paused in his dabbing. "Why? What for?"

"Supply and demand, like ev-

erything else." Jamison sighed again, speaking as if to a small child. "There's a heavy demand for B-twelve due to malnutrition and anemia. Mexico manufactures its own, but not enough. The process is complicated and done under license to an American firm, which holds the patent. All of which makes it valuable."

Silvestri asked, "How much for the trip?"

"I've offered Raude five thousand dollars, one trip a month."

"We'll split fifty-fifty this time, Jim," Raude said, "After expenses."

"Uh-huh." Silvestri studied his beer, peeling the label. "No."

"No?" Jamison frowned. "I don't follow."

"I don't follow *you*. You could fly, drive, walk or—*hell*—mail that package across. The border is as tight as a fishnet."

"If it were, I wouldn't be here." Jamison closed his eyes, pinching the bridge of his nose between thumb and forefinger. "Both sides are using ground-zero radar and spotter planes. The border fence is eight feet high, there is the Rio Grande, and spike-mikes have been planted all over, a legacy from Vietnam.

"To fly privately is increasingly risky. To fly commercially

chances customs and security inspectors liable to open the package out of curiosity, less than from any suspicion of smuggling. And who can count on the mails these days, legal or otherwise? I'd drive if this were only a few kilos of grass or some of your parrots, and I'd do what the Mexicans do when caught—drop everything and run like hell. But B-twelve is worth enough to import and distribute on a steady reliable basis."

"Well, you'd better think of another pipeline. It won't be me."

"Jim! Five thousand each month—you *have* to!" Raude was pleading.

"Eric, I don't *have* to do anything." Silvestri looked back at Jamison, who was regarding him with startled curiosity. "I won't because I can't. A mile out from shore be damned! By the time I swam in and back, naval cutters could be swarming all over the boat."

"I'll say I've got engine trouble if they do," Raude said.

"They'd tow you in, Eric, and I'd be stranded. And a sea-sled is no good. It's not much faster, and it'd be picked up on their sonar. No, the odds are lousy . . ." Silvestri stood up and paced around behind his chair, grasping its back with both hands. "I might have a better

way. It'll cost extra, Jamison, but only this one time . . . ”

Jamison smiled meagerly. “Now it's my turn to ask how much.”

“Ten thousand, payable to me alone when I land.”

“Jim, what in Sam—”

“All right,” Jamison snapped, interrupting Raude. “A good plan will be worth that, particularly if it's paid off on delivery.”

“You must be in some kind of bind,” Silvestri said with a soft grin. Then, before Jamison could protest, “Simple. I'll discard my gear when I come ashore. Your contact will bring along some casual clothes for me, and I'll leave on the next flight out of Tampico, respectable, innocent, and clean. The only snag might be a Mexican tourist card, stamped to show I legally entered a day or so before.”

Jamison cocked his head to the left, then slowly began to nod. “I like it. Yes, I *like* it. There'll be the expense of the air fare and new equipment for your next trip down, but that's minor. The card won't be difficult. It and a ticket will be with your clothes.”

“Well, *I* don't like it,” Raude said bitterly. “I'll only be getting a fourth of the cut instead of half.”

“And taking none of the

risk.” Silvestri leaned heavily on the chair. “You're getting the amount you bargained for, for less work. You don't wait this way, but head straight back here once I'm over the side. I'm the one—me—who's sticking his neck out.”

“Sure but—”

“No buts.” Silvestri's face reddened. “It's my way or nothing.”

“Agree,” Jamison advised. “A diver I need, not a boat captain.”

Raude settled back disgruntled, glaring at both of them, mopping his face with harried movements. Silvestri went up to the bridge, came back with a map of the Mexican coastline and laid it flat on the table. Jamison marked a lagoon south of Ciudad Madero which, he said, was a local fishermen's cemetery with a good beach, normally deserted. By computing the Bucket at a conservative twelve knots, a rendezvous was figured for four ayem, the morning after next.

“Half now,” Jamison said, producing a bulging wallet and counting out money. “And half when you return.”

“Have my other half with the clothes,” Silvestri said, getting to his feet.

“As you wish.” Jamison rose, his fingers light on the table. “I'll bring my package here mi-

nutes before you leave tonight. Say, seven-ish?"

RAUDE NODDED, watching Jamison depart and scooping his share of the bills, crumpling them into his pants. "After expenses, Jim."

Silvestri peeled off a hundred dollars and folded the rest away as if it were immaterial. He started for the aft companion-way.

"Where're you going?" Raude demanded.

"To check my gear."

"Yeah—and maybe I'd better get home, get some dinner and tell Myrna I'll be gone a few days. I'll pick up some supplies and be back in about an hour. Gas and water we'll get when we cast off." Raude paused, rubbing his thick jaw. "You think it's really B-twelve?"

Silvestri shrugged. "It's a new one, but I'm no doctor."

"Vitamins or whatever, I bet it's worth more than five grand."

"Could be, Eric, could be . . ."

Silvestri left Raude in the cabin, ducking down into the hold. He opened the hatch for light and checked his equipment, which was old and worn but in as good shape as he could keep it. After he'd heard Raude go ashore, he hauled his two 1.4-litre air tanks topside through the hatch and con-

nected them to an electric compressor. He sat in a sway-back chair under the awning which covered most of the stern, listening to the compressor fill the tanks, trying to sort a few things out.

The deal stunk.

His own part was dangerously ripe enough, but it was the hidden nine-tenths Jamison had left unexplained that gave off the really rancid odor. A polished man with polished reasons and some very polished research—an original plan no seasoned diver would ever touch—the relative ease to which the extra ten thousand was agreed to . . . There were too many submerged angles that bothered Silvestri, though he had a strong suspicion he'd like the smell worse if he ever discovered what they were.

Once he'd have done his job and ignored the rest. But that would have been before Las Vegas—before his and an old Navy buddy's sure-fire scheme to milk one of the casinos—before a half-dozen men with hammers almost crippled him permanently—before his buddy suddenly and efficiently "disappeared" forever. There's a lot of sand outside of Vegas to bury a lot of trouble.

By the time Silvestri's hands had healed, he'd lost everything—his youth, his

money; his inclination for high-stake gambles. The types of jobs he'd held were closed to him. The penny-ante ones he could get he'd been playing tight to the chest, down at a level where the pots were too small to attract attention, and the sharks were few and transparent.

Now, along comes a shark named Jamison, cruising too low for too many unsaid reasons. Not that there was any question about doing the job or not—Silvestri had been finding it increasingly difficult to stomach Raude and his niggardly smuggling racket. This could be his escape. He was restless enough at this point to take far greater risks . . .

"Jim . . ."

Silvestri swung around and saw Myrna coming toward him across the deck. "I have to talk to you." She stopped in front of him, quivering, her purse clutched tightly in both hands. "Jim, Eric was home just now. He told me all about what you're planning to do."

"Oh? So he's talking to *you* now."

"Please, are you returning? Jim, *please*, I have to know."

Silvestri turned to watch the gauges, wishing she'd go away.

"You're not, are you?" Her face was sullen now, her lips white in spite of the fresh

lipstick. "As soon as Eric said how you wanted to be paid more, I knew you're not. You're going to fly but not back here. Don't lie to me, Jim, I've heard you talking enough times about wanting a way to get out of this for good."

"I won't lie." Silvestri glanced at her again, grimacing impatiently. "It stinks, but yeah, it gives me a chance. It's the only reason I'm in on it."

"Take me with you." Her eyes were pleading, wide and watery.

"I can't. I'll be in Tampico alone, I have to be, and—"

"No, listen to me! Eric said this package was worth a lot of money, a fortune maybe. We'll take it, Jim, and go wherever you want—to Europe, to South America, I don't care where."

"And Eric?"

"Forget Eric. If he tries to stop us, we'll—we'll kill him."

"As simple as that—we'll kill him."

"I'm willing to risk it, Jim."

Silvestri smiled, small and rueful. "I'm not."

"But I *love* you! Don't you love me, Jim, is that it?"

"You've got it backwards, Myrna. You never loved me. I was only a poor jerk willing to boost your ego. But I could've been anybody."

"What a rotten thing to say!"

"I thought we weren't lying,"

Silvestri said wearily. "Go home."

"So maybe I don't love you—so we get along, don't we? I'll be good to you, you'll see. We'll be rich, Jim—you can't pass it up!"

"Myrna, I'm earning enough by playing it straight. I want a fresh start, not a continuation of how things have been, and I'm getting too old to mess up what's probably my last chance."

"You're scared." Her lips peeled back over sharp, small teeth. "That's all it is, Jim, you're just gutless scared!"

"Stop shouting." He glanced over her shoulder, seeing Raude lumbering up the plank. "I'm tired of it and your husband's here."

"I don't care. I'm not finished with you."

Raude bore down, face mottled. "Myrna, what're you doing here?"

"She was just leaving." Silvestri said.

"Shut up." Raude clenched his fists. "Well, Myrna?"

"I've a right to go where I please." She glared savagely at Raude and then at Silvestri. Then, abruptly, she stalked away.

"She's mine, Jim." Raude said harshly. "Stay away from her."

"Tell her to stay away from

me." Silvestri braced himself, expecting a swing. But Raude's eyes cooled after a brief flaring, and he pivoted to hurry after his wife. Silvestri topped his tanks and lugged them below, then went ashore to his dreary apartment.

When he returned to the Bucket, Raude and Jamison were again waiting for him in the cabin. Raude was annoyed as usual, but not belligerent, making no caustic reference to the incident with Myrna.

"Now that we're all here," Jamison said, handing Raude his package, "there won't be any misunderstandings. You've full possession of it now. Oh, and be careful, the paper tears quite easily."

The package was as stated, the size of an ordinary brick, wrapped in brownish waxed paper and reinforced tape. "You have my money, clothes, and card ready when I surface," Silvestri said, tapping the package. "Don't worry about us fiddling with it."

"I'm not. From now on, it's your worry." Jamison gave a tight little smile, nodded curtly to both men, and disappeared topside.

Raude locked the package in a metal box he kept hidden in the bilge, then he and Silvestri carried boxes of supplies on board and stowed them. By

eight o'clock they had cast off, heading out of Corpus Christi bay, up through the Laguna Madre waterway, around the tip of Port Arkansas, into the Gulf of Mexico.

Silvestri sat under the awning and watched the horizon as its orange streaks faded and shadows deepened, the sky blending from indigo wash into night. The Bucket plunged, her bow pushing through the swells while the sharp gleam of city lights gradually dissolved into the textured black marble of open sea. Raude strapped the wheel to hold a southerly course, trimmed the running lights and joined Silvestri.

"Think that Jamison means it?" Raude asked, sitting down with a heavy sigh and spreading his legs. "About the paper and all?"

"Yeah. If I show up with the package tampered with, I'm dead."

"Dead, huh?" Raude was wearing a duck-billed cap now, and he took it off to rumple his hair. "I still don't like it much."

"What, the job?"

"No, I mean you getting four times as much as me."

"Forget it, Eric. We'll jack him up again and halve it next time."

Raude resettled his cap. "Sure. Next time . . ."

They spoke little the rest of

that night or the following day and, when they did, the words meant little. What communication lay between them was ruptured, perhaps due to Myrna, or due to Silvestri knowing and Raude sensing this was the last time they'd be together. Perhaps by both or something entirely different.

Silvestri couldn't tell and didn't much care. He occasionally thought of Myrna and her suggestion, how it fit her guilesome perfumed greed. He didn't doubt that she'd have tired of him too and shown no more qualms about dropping him than she had her husband. Of Raude he thought nothing. And maybe he could trust Jamison and maybe not. Maybe the job was as it seemed, and maybe he was too vulnerable, wading ashore clumsy and exposed in his gear.

He thought a lot about the maybes, sitting and honing his stiletto, practicing throws against the aft bulkhead of the bridge. Bored with the continual swells and spray, impatient to be away, off the treadmill on which he'd allowed himself to drift, listening to the sound of steel into wood . . .

CIUDAD MADERO was dark and asleep when the Bucket swung parallel to the coastline. Silves-

(Please turn to page 118)

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tri went below and changed into his wetsuit, carried his gear topside and held the wheel while Raude retrieved the package. He placed it in the waterproof container that was attached to his tank pack, pushing it down on top of a kitbag already inside. The kitbag held his wallet, passport, razor and a few other meager belongings worth salvaging from his apartment.

He stepped out on deck with Raude's binoculars, studying the shore and the bar at the mouth of the Pánuco, seeing now the dull glow of Tampico seven miles upriver. He went back to the bridge and began strapping on his pack. "It's early, but I think I'd better get started."

"Probably so." Raude cut the engine. "You need any help?"

"No, thanks. On the beach, maybe." Silvestri smiled, hefting his shoulders to distribute the weight. "Well, goodbye, Eric."

"Yeah." Raude made a thumb-up gesture. "Good luck, Jim."

Silvestri moved out the door, toward the stern. He wet his mask and slipped on his fins and gloves. The stiletto was warm against his right palm. He clamped his mouthpiece and fell backwards over the side. He took his time, orienting himself

by his wrist compass and reading the currents. He rested twice, using the buoyancy vest to float him, and reached the breakers a little under an hour later.

As planned, he surfaced far to the right of the cemetery. He worked his way through tangles of kelp and seaweed to an outcropping of rock, where he crouched and removed his mask. Ahead, beyond the sand, was a small eroded hillock on which were clumps of brush and rounded boulders. The heads of a few crosses and gravestones could barely be seen—and, further back, the vague outline of a building—the chapel? On the beach in front of the cemetery were spars and stakes stuck in the sand as informal homage, a fishnet strung over a series of them to commemorate the loss of an entire ship's crew.

Beneath the net a man squatted.

Silvestri studied the man, then the darkness lining the shore. He'd avoided surfacing directly at the rendezvous point for fear of a trap, but so far he'd not been able to detect one. The scrub and rock, however, could be hiding most anything from him. He waited. Ten minutes passed and he waited some more.

The beach remained silent

except for the breakers crumbling behind him, and deserted except for the man sitting motionless under the net. That was the trouble, Silvestri thought—it was too quiet, too empty. Yet, like it or not, he'd have to make his move. He waded back into the water, working his way around toward the man. The man saw him and stood up, waving.

"*Hola!*" the man yelled in Spanish. "You've come with my package?"

"*Si,*" Silvestri called back. "And you, my money and my card?"

The man held up a loosely tied bundle. "And your clothes, *amigo*."

Silvestri trudged through the surf, hindered by his flippers. The man was bigger than he had first estimated, his face blunt with a flattened nose, his trousers and jacket wrinkled but his boots as shiny as Jamison's. Silvestri frowned at the boots, then looked past, into the shadows.

"You act afraid." The man laughed, extending the bundle. "Don't worry, *amigo*, we're alone save for the fishermen in their graves."

Silvestri tucked the bundle under his left arm. If a surprise was coming, it would come now. He turned sideways, tensing as he removed his gloves. "Your



package is in the container between my tanks."

The man said softly, "You're under arrest."

Silvestri felt a gun muzzle poke his side, and he stiffened.

"Don't move. Your *compadre* did. I'd prefer you alive." The man whistled. A number of militia suddenly appeared from the brush.

Silvestri acted on impulse, before he could think it through. As the man whistled, his pistol moved, and Silvestri moved into it, bringing his left arm around to cuff the gun aside. The stiletto was ready in his right hand. He thrust the blade and felt it enter the man's shoulder. The pistol dropped to the sand.

"Call them off, *señor*." Silvestri moved the blade to the man's throat, pricking slightly

to break the skin. "Call them off."

There was a hoarse shout, and the militia lowered their weapons.

Silvestri backed away slowly, keeping the man as his shield. He secured the bundle between his tank straps with his left hand, then turned on the tanks and lowered his mask. He could smell the other's fear and saw the tight, frozen eyes.

"Walk with me further into the water," he ordered. "I won't hurt you if you do what I say."

The man was evidently a disbeliever. He lashed out, and in his desperation he stumbled from the tug of the surf, away from Silvestri—falling, screaming, as if he thought he were falling because he'd been knifed. With a clear target. The militia opened fire.

Silvestri was diving. Bullets came after him, whipping around him as he headed for open water. He didn't stop until he was out of range, only then surfaced to suck in the humid air. The militia continued raking the water with automatic bursts, but they were only chasing shadows now. His wetsuit was ripped and his tanks nearly empty, but Silvestri felt amazed to learn he was alive.

He felt sick, sick at the senselessness of the other man's panic, sick of his own stupidity.

A set-up—no, a ambush complete with bait. The man inferred he'd killed Silvestri's com-padre, which indicated a contact had been waiting there, and had been surprised by one or another branch of the Mexican government. Which meant they'd been tipped off, and Silvestri could well guess by whom.

Silvestri suddenly felt better, no longer sick but with a wild urge to laugh. He'd love to see Myrna's face when she learned he was alive, with everything he needed to escape and make his fortune. Who wouldn't want to laugh?

He dove again, knowing he'd have to swim quickly before the picket boats surrounded the area. He'd head up the Pánuco to Tampico, then to Mexico City where he'd unload the B-12, or whatever the package was. He knew enough people and enough Spanish from his parrot smuggling with Raude to get by. Once and for all, to get out and be free.

Then he sobered. He wouldn't be free, not really. The emotion he'd felt for the man returned, and he realized his sickness contained no true remorse. That was the galling part. Despite knowing he'd acted in self-defense, he wondered what kind of man he was becoming to feel no pity. He thought of

what he'd told Myrna, all his words about wanting a chance to start over fresh. He resurfaced, looking at the river, yet unable to see anything but his own internal hollowness. He began swimming westward, toward Tampico.

Hours later, he crawled from the city's harbor. Dawn was fast approaching. Quickly he stashed his gear, keeping the container and bundle. Afraid of wasting more time, he opened his search while still wearing his wetsuit. He'd won, only to discover he couldn't cash in. The package was the pot in a game he no longer wanted to play. To steal it would be stealing more from himself. He saw that now. He recalled that once there'd been an AID or OAS mission here; perhaps there still was. Or maybe a consul. At least *somebody* he could talk to.

There was. He found an American official named Hammond, who answered his door wearing a bathrobe and a sleepy expression. While his wife brewed coffee, Hammond ushered Silvestri into his den, where, together, they opened the container on his desk blotter.

The container held only the kitbag.

The bundle was only folded strips of sackcloth.

No card, no money, no clothes, especially no package.

"Quite a story. Unbelievable, except . . ." Hammond poured dollops of brandy into their coffees, brooding, then continued, "Your package might well be vitamin B-twelve. It's true enough there's a heavy demand. Black marketing in it is almost worldwide. However, Silvestri, what do you know about genetic manipulation of bacteria?"

"Nothing."

"Not in my line, either. But I understand a molecule called DNA determines the pattern of all life forms. Recently, It's been learned how to cut DNA into pieces that can be recombined, then incorporated into bacteria to alter them. In effect, creating new organisms whose potential for causing disease is beyond calculation. A week ago, just such a mutant culture was found to be missing from our government's Animal Isolation Laboratory in Ardmore, Oklahoma."

"I never heard—"

"Would you, Silvestri? Think of the public outcry a while back when we moved our old stocks of poison gas. Now, this culture could be perfectly harmless, but think of the hysterical response to what smacks of biological warfare, the Black Plague, and Frankenstein on

the loose all rolled into one. Believe me, there's an international search going on that's very quiet but very, very intensive."

"That would explain why Jamison couldn't use the normal channels into Mexico and came to us," Silvestri said.

He fingered the sodden sack-cloth, thinking, And why we were warned not to open the package; and why, if we had, it would have looked like something from a lab, like B-twelve. Jamison had been lying about more than one delivery, and undoubtedly his contact had instructions to kill me, the bundle only a dummy to lure me out of the water.

But then, he thought, Myrna had notified the authorities who would know where he'd be. She was a scorned and vindictive woman who wasn't going to cash in on the package and was going to make sure nobody else did either. and, in the process, pay back an old lover. That was obvious—as obvious as Raude having taken the package out of my container, seeing his opportunity for riches and revenge when I took a moment to check the coast. Finally, I haven't played it right, coming to Hammond for reasons I feel strongly, but can't logically explain even to

myself. Yeah, somehow we've all managed to cheat one another . . .

This time Silvestri couldn't help laughing. A quadruple-cross!

"I'll make some phone-calls," Hammond said. "I don't think Raude will get far, but let's hope he's picked up before he opens the package or tries to peddle it. For his sake as well as our own."

"Uh-huh." Silvestri rubbed tired eyes. "What about me?"

"Well, there'll be questions, of course. But you came voluntarily, so I don't suppose you'll be in much trouble." Hammond poured more brandy. "When the flap's died down, I'll have a special permit issued. It'll only be good for returning to the States, I'm afraid."

"Fine," Silvestri said. He meant it. He foresaw the days ahead as struggles and the nights as skirmishes against the darker recesses of his mind, but the big battle was over. He felt strangely satisfied at having beaten the game without being aware it had been rigged in every possible direction. "Yeah, that's fine by me."

"You took a gamble coming here. But it was for the best."

"Mr. Hammond, I can truthfully say it was the only chance I had."

IF YOU PLAY WITH FIRE...

by BILL PRONZINI

Favro got his wish—but the devil put a joker in the deck.

A "DIFFERENT" STORY

THE MEANEST MAN in the world was named Alexander Favro.

Tall, cadaverous, middle-aged, possessed of burning green eyes, he hated with equal passion—children, animals, the Arts, Christmas, honesty and little old ladies. He liked only two things.

Money—which he coveted almost obscenely.

And black magic—which fascinated him.

Intrinsically, Favro was a recluse. He left the old and secluded Victorian mansion he had obtained through the skillful, if slightly macabre, nudging of a certain widowed lady into the Hereafter, only upon the rarest and most necessary of occasions. He was reputed by the more imaginative children of the small East Coast village wherein he lived, to be a warlock who practiced strange and terrible rites in the deepest dark of night.



The fact of the matter was that Favro had been observed by two young boys in the process of gleefully immolating a full-throated tomcat late one summer night. The story, during subsequent telling and re-

telling, took on exaggerated proportions.

He hoarded his money with the venal instincts of a Scrooge. He preferred stealing food and household necessities to buying them, and had owned the same two suits of clothes for the past thirty-one years.

It would seem consistent, then, that a man such as Favro would have managed to acquire at least a comfortable, if not vast, fortune. Not so. As he would often lament to himself, he seemed to be cursed with unbelievably bad luck.

Almost every scheme he devised to satisfy his rapacious lust for wealth netted him, in the final analysis, exactly nothing. His only tangible realizations from these plots were the Victorian mansion and, from a few isolated instances, sufficient funds to allow him no more than a minor hoard of cash. To a man of Favro's character, this was unbearably frustrating.

However, one evening following his latest and seemingly endless procession of failures, Favro happened to remove from a shelf in his library one of the books dealing with ceremonial magic and necromancy. He had read perhaps one third of it when there came to him the genesis of a solution. This seed began to grow in Favro's mind

until, after no little consideration, it became nothing less than a firm resolution.

He would conjure up a demon.

Once this decision was reached, it took on obsessive proportions. He read eagerly, in ensuing days, every volume he possessed pertaining to the summoning of a spirit. He drew on the cold cement floor of his cellar countless incantations and invocations. He collected—secretly and at no little damage to his limited finances—various items he deemed necessary for conjuring.

All to no avail.

No demon appeared.

But Favro was not deterred. He set about obtaining, through means legal and extra-legal, every available work dealing with black magic. Having gotten these, he read each carefully and then followed the instructions contained in them to the very letter.

Still no demon appeared.

Then, on an afternoon five months after he had begun his quest, Alexander Favro received in the mail an ancient, leather-bound volume entitled *The Rites of Goetic Theurgy*.

The book, which had been forwarded to him by a "dealer" in a tiny Balkan country, aroused Favro to high excitement. He knew, with intuitive

insight, that the conjuration he read therein would not fail.

The preparations for the summoning of the demon were extremely complicated. There were a pentagram and a magical circle to draw, both on a parchment of calfskin, which was then to be worn on the white vestment of the operator. There was the demon's seal to fashion of copper metal. There was another seal—designated the Secret Seal of Solomon—which was to be drawn with the blood of a black cock that had never been engendered, on virgin parchment.

There was a list of the following to compile—a sceptre, a sword, a mitre, a long robe of white linen, a girdle of lion's skin three inches wide, materials for fumigation, oil to anoint the temples and eyes, clean water for the ablution. There was a rigid series of dicta to follow, which included an austere fast of three days, isolation from human society and abstinence from all sexual activity.

With the zeal of the possessed, Favro set immediately about the task. It took him some time, and all but a few dollars of his remaining funds, to complete the preparations. He had difficulty in obtaining only the black cock, which he finally had to appropriate in the dark

hours just before dawn from a stubborn poultry rancher in a neighboring state, and the girdle of lion's skin.

The Directors of a certain large eastern zoo remain puzzled to this day by the strange disappearance of one of their prized males. The dicta proved no problem at all, for he was a man who took little enjoyment in the consumption of food, a confirmed recluse as noted and a practicing misogynist.

At long last, Favro was ready. On a cold, clear morning in mid-winter—*The Rites of Goetic Thuergy* had made it clear that the conjuration was to take place between the hours of sunrise and noon—Favro went down into his cellar and drew on the scrubbed cement floor the ceremonial circle. The prescribed triangle was drawn two feet outside the circle and three feet over it. That completed, he stepped into the circle, performed the proper ceremony, and recited the First Conjunction.

Nothing happened.

He repeated it frequently, as per instructions.

Nothing happened.

He recited the Second Conjunction, repeating it frequently.

Nothing happened.

He recited the Third Conjunction, repeating it frequently.

Something happened.

There was an intense burst of crimson phosphorescence. There was an enveloping cloud of foul gray smoke. There was a terrible, tortured, wailing cry.

When the miasma had cleared, there was the demon.

Favro was startled. The book had explained that the wearing of the demon's seal on his white vestment would compel the spirit to appear in human form, without any deformity or horror; but Favro had not expected that form to be of a pale, nondescript "male" dressed in a gray business suit and smiling good-naturedly—especially not after the light-smoke-wail preamble.

"You have only to request," the demon said in a pleasant, well-modulated voice, "and your fondest passion shall be mine to fulfill."

Favro knew precisely what his "fondest passion" would be. He had spent long hours contemplating its selection.

He said firmly, "I want a room full of one-thousand dollar bills—American, of course."

The demon smiled. "Of course. It is as all who summon we of King Amaymon desire, in one form or another. Have you a preference of rooms?"

"The library," Favro replied with hesitation. Naturally—it was the largest room in the house.

"I shall obey. But first, I am bound to ask if you realize that you are only able to summon me this one time, that on no other occasion will I or any other spirit appear upon your command."

"Yes," Favro said. "Yes, I realize that."

"And if you are aware of the reciprocation required of you for having called me here, and for the favor I shall now grant you."

"Yes, yes!" Favro said impatiently. The ultimate possession of his soul did not particularly worry him, especially in view of the fact that for thirty years there had been little doubt in his mind who it was going to be anyway. "Get on with it."

Still smiling, the demon made an incomprehensible gesture in the air with one hand. "It is done. And now, if it be your will, you may discharge me. I am awaited elsewhere."

Quickly, Favro performed the closing ceremony and delivered the License to Depart. Upon its completion, there came another searing flash of light, another cloud of evil-smelling vapor, another inhuman cry fading rapidly into silence.

When the smoke was gone, so was the demon.

Favro hurriedly stepped out of the magical circle and ran up the stairs. At the closed library

door, he paused with his hand on the heavy brass knob. Although not ordinarily given to outward displays of emotion, he was now trembling with excitement.

He drew a deep breath, retained it, turned the knob, flung the door wide.

He was promptly inundated by a crackling cascade of green.

A short, ecstatic cry burst from the very core of Favro's being. He threw himself headlong into this cool, verdant ocean. Hooked fingers like hungry steel jaws entrapped, consumed, great quantities of the fluttering stuff. He bathed in it, face upturned to a self-perpetuated shower, and planted moist and passionate kisses with quivering lips on bill after bill after bill.

Alexander Favro, at long last, had achieved his own private Valhalla.

It took some two hours for his euphoria to ebb. When it did regress to reason his first entirely rational consideration—understandably enough—was to supply protection for his newly-acquired wealth.

Also understandable was what Favro, having considered the consideration, then proceeded to do. He went out to buy a vault.

He spent some time making his selection. Finally, he was

shown, at a particular firm in a nearby city, an impressive construction some three feet thick, of solid steel. Its imposing door had double combination locks, the set of numbers being so intricate as to make it impossible for anyone not having the proper rotations to open it. It was virtually burglar proof.

At only eleven thousand dollars it was far superior to any of its kind manufactured anywhere, being used by the finest corporations, gem concerns and the like throughout the world. And which discriminating company, the salesman asked discreetly, did Mr. Favro happen to represent?

Favro deposited eleven of the one-thousand dollar bills on the salesman's desk—reluctantly, since even such a necessary expenditure as this pained him deeply—and gruffly said that he wanted the vault delivered to his home. Immediately.

The salesman suffered a sudden attack of muteness. Smiling, Favro departed and went home.

He spent the following two days shuttered in his library, simply sitting amidst all the green and making little mewling sounds of pleasure. They were wonderful, blissful days for Alexander Favro.

And the only ones he was to have.

On the morning of the third day, two grave men wearing business suits came and forced their way inside and placed him under arrest.

Favro was naturally stunned. When he could speak again, he drew himself up indignantly and snapped, "What's the meaning of this outrage? I have done nothing wrong. You can't arrest me."

"No?" the taller of the two men said. "Well, it seems to me that the manufacture and passage of counterfeit United States currency could hardly be construed as 'doing nothing wrong'."

Favro went white. His jaw dropped. His eyes protruded. "Counterfeit? Counterfeit? Impossible!"

"And really not very good counterfeit, at that," the other man said. "Oh, the bills themselves are of extremely expert workmanship. But why you substituted a series of three sixes for the serial number on all of them is beyond me. Didn't you know?"

Favro was no longer listening. He had been struck, in that moment for the first time, with the realization that the Powers of Darkness were, after all, those of deceit, treachery and malevolence. Also, that the Devil always takes care of his own.

Three sixes, he thought. Six-six-six . . .

The Mark of the Beast.

Suddenly, Alexander Favro began to laugh. He laughed long and he laughed loud, he laughed until tears formed rolling streams on his cheeks. He laughed until he collapsed, writhing, on the hardwood floor.

The two Treasury agents looked at one another. "What's the matter with you, Favro?" the taller one asked.

"You can go to hell, too," he said, and laughed that much harder.

Later, after the still-hysterical Favro had been remanded into the custody of the local police, the agents remained in the library to confiscate the bogus currency.

The taller man said, "It's too bad he went off the deep end. I'd like to know where the plates he used are cached."

"Well," the other one said philosophically, "it doesn't really matter, under the circumstances. They'll turn up one of these days."

The first man raised one of the bills to the light, studying it. Finally, he shook his head wonderingly and extended it to his partner. Smiling, he said, "Now isn't this a hell of a note?"

He had no idea, of course, just how right he was.

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